

THE

LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

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No. 1249.—VOL. XLVIII.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING APRIL 9, 1887.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



[“DON’T!” SAID THE GIRL, SOFTLY; “HE ALWAYS USED TO CALL ME THAT.”]

GUY FORRESTER'S SECRET.

CHAPTER III.

It is a long voyage from Maryland to England, for the islands over which Sir Joshua ruled are farther from our shores than the most distant Australian port; besides, all vessels called at Sydney, and there was often a detention of some days; so that, in spite of all the haste Guy Forrester could make, October had been in his grave two months and more before his heir and executor set foot once more on English ground.

Poor Guy! Seven years' exile, and no familiar smile, no well-remembered voice, to bid him welcome on his return!

Mr. Forrester thought no home-coming could well have been more desolate than his own.

He was heir to half-a-million of money, but there was not the slightest exultation in his breast as, after a hasty lunch at the

Charing-cross Hotel, he sallied forth to call on Mr. Smith's lawyer, feeling he simply could not face his strong-minded ward alone and unprotected.

It was about three o'clock when he turned into the Temple; a telegram had apprized Messrs. Fordred Brothers of his arrival in England, and orders had been given to show him at once into the senior partner's private room.

Guy tasted the first fruits of the veneration wealth commands in the obsequiousness of the clerk who came forward to receive him.

But when he had once passed through the double doors of green baize and entered the private sanctum Guy had no need to think his honours at all impressed Mr. Fordred. An elderly gentleman, with silvery hair and a courtly, patrician face, rose to receive him with all civility, but his manner was cold almost to frigidity, and he seemed purposely to overlook the stranger's proffered hand.

“I am thankful you have returned to England, Mr. Forrester. My late client's extraordinary will has made your absence peculiarly unfortunate.”

Guy's simple earnestness disarmed the other's prejudice in an instant.

“I shall regret all my days, Mr. Fordred, I did not return three months sooner. I would gladly have done so had I known the poor old man's health was failing. I owed him a debt of gratitude no effort of mine could ever repay.”

“He was a good fellow, shrewd and clear-headed. Nothing in his conduct ever surprised me but his will. He seemed perfectly to worship his granddaughter, and yet he passed her over for a stranger. The only mention of Anastasia in his will is that he leaves her to your sole care and guardianship.”

Guy wondered vaguely how much this keen-eyed lawyer had been taken into Jabez Smith's confidence.

“You may be sure, Mr. Fordred, I shall regard Anastasia as a sacred trust, and study her happiness and comfort.”

“I am sure you will try to. I understand my old friend's confidence far better now I have seen you; but I confess at first I thought it a mad will. I said to my brother what was to hinder your treating the whole fortune as



though it was your own—it is your own legally—and leaving that poor girl penniless!"

"It is my intention to form a suitable establishment for Mr. Smith's granddaughter at once—one worthy an heiress of her wealth. For myself, I have made a good deal of money lately, and hope to make more. My uncle has offered me a home at Ardmore. I shall have no need to appropriate Mr. Smith's fortune."

Mr. Fordred shook his head.

"I have known Anastasia pretty nearly all her life, and I don't mind telling you she is the last girl to be happy if she thinks herself under an obligation to a stranger. Talk of pride! She seems to me to have enough for a dozen girls."

"I should be very glad if you could give me any information respecting Miss Smith."

"Well, though I've known her all these years, I can hardly describe her. She is very independent and very clever. Her most striking point is an intense objection to any suggestions of love or marriage; a bit of a shrew, you know. Why, I had a nephew who admired her, and she turned the garden hose on him—she did, indeed. I remonstrated with her grandfather afterwards, but he only said the child was quite right to show the young fellow she meant 'No,' and would stick to it. Now, Mr. Forrester, that's a specimen of Anastasia Smith's up-bringing. I don't believe the old man ever crossed her wishes in his life until he left her to your guardianship."

"She objected to that, then?"

"Most strongly. I drew up the will, and I know the clauses appointing her your ward was thoroughly against her wishes."

Guy sighed.

"I suppose she is at Acacia Lodge?"

"Oh, dear, no! She said Acacia Lodge was yours, and she didn't mean to be indebted to you for a shelter. She is in apartments in Bloomsbury."

"A very undesirable arrangement for a young lady."

"I quite agree with you, but I was powerless to interfere. You see, Miss Smith is not penniless. She has a small income inherited from her mother, and as she came into this two years ago, she can set all remonstrances at defiance."

"She must be detestable!"

Mr. Jordred smiled.

"She is most decided in speech and character, but I don't think I should call her detestable."

"I hate mason-line women!"

"So do I. Of course, if you wished to see your guardianship aided by Miss Smith's marriage. It is trying for you; but I frankly confess I don't believe she will ever accept a suitor."

"She doesn't get on with men, I suppose?"

"She banishes them with a high hand; but Anastasia's not a bad sort of girl, I assure you, Mr. Forrester. There's a great deal of good in her."

"So there was Boadicea and that woman in the Bible who hammered a nail through a man's forehead—a great deal of good in them both, but still hardly the type of feminine excellency one admires."

"When will you see her?"

"At once—to-day, if possible. Will you escort me?"

"That is beyond my power. I could only gain Anastasia's promise to see you on condition that you went alone, and she received two hours' clear notice of your arrival."

"To prepare for the shock?"

"To insure privacy, I fancy. She has gone in for a great many classes lately, and there are a lot of people in and out."

"Will you send word I shall be with her at seven o'clock?"

"You really mean to go to-night? Better have a sound sleep to brace your nerves. I warn you you will find your ward a handful!"

"I would rather go to-night. We can

easily allow Miss Smith the stipulated notice, and yet let me be there by seven."

"I will send at once. You will dine with me, perhaps, Mr. Forrester, after your interview with Miss Smith? I am an old bachelor, and live over the offices, but I shall be delighted to have your company and assist you as far as I can in your plans for your ward's welfare."

"Thank you. I will gladly accept."

He had time to return to his hotel and smoke a cigar before setting out on his undertaking.

Guy was not a dandy, but yet he gave a lingering glance at his own face in the large mirror over the chimney-piece before he left the smoking-room.

Perhaps he was wondering what effect his appearance would produce on Anastasia.

Guy had never been called vain, but he knew that his features were of the type women most admire—that at Maryland he had been known as the "handsome secretary," and that his dark blue eyes and rich brown hair had charmed many a girl's fancy.

He was changed. Seven years had left their mark upon him. He was now in the prime of life, and for a long while no grief or care had touched him.

He looked a little graver and more thoughtful than his years warranted, but otherwise success and prosperity were imprinted on his brow.

"I wish it was well over. It's an awful nuisance! Why couldn't old Smith have lived a little longer? He might have made his grandchild reason!"

A cab rattled him swiftly to Bloomsbury, and very soon he was knocking at the door of a tall, grim house not far from Queen's square—a most respectable-looking dwelling, which quite reassured him as to Miss Smith's present well-being.

It was a lodging-house of a most superior type.

A key in buttons opened the door, and replied that Miss Smith was at home. Guy felt ready to wish she wasn't. The nearer the introduction approached the more he wavered.

He was ushered into a large room furnished in comfortable, homely style. Evidently it serving its tenant for all purposes of treating life, since a kettle on the hearth, a pile of pamphlets on the table, and a tray of visiting cards, proved clearly that eating and drinking, reading and calling, were all carried on in the same apartment.

Guy glanced at one of the books, and found it to be a treatise on the higher education of women.

He gave a groan, and advanced to the fire. Here at least Miss Smith was womanly. It burnt clear and bright, and the hearth was swept with minute care.

"Good evening, Mr. Forrester!"

He turned at sound of the cold, metallic voice, and found himself facing a lady of tall, imposing appearance, and small, beady, black eyes.

She looked quite ten years more than her real age, and was dressed in a horribly ill-fitting black serge, the front protected by an apron much stained with ink.

She seemed well-bred and used to society, for she bowed to Guy with perfect self-possession, begged him to be seated, and even observed it was thoughtful of him to come to see her so soon.

Guy felt his courage oozing out at his finger-tips.

The idea of his playing mentor and guardian to this miracle of self-possession was absurd.

He decided no letter had ever been there than the one in which Miss Anastasia informed him she could protect herself.

"I was naturally anxious to see you!"

She stared at him.

"Oh! because of my grandfather and the promise you gave him? But of course it's not binding on you now?"

Guy looked at her gravely.

"According to the law of England—according to every instinct of right and justice—my promise is as binding as the day I uttered it! Have you forgotten that day, Anastasia?"

"Don't wander from the point," said Miss Smith, shortly. "I'd rather keep to business!"

"I am entirely at your orders."

"The late Jabez Smith——"

"Your grandfather."

"Don't talk to a female lecturer of her grandfather. It sounds disrespectful and old-fashioned!"

"I beg your pardon."

"The late Jabez Smith," continued Anastasia, "left you an enormous fortune, to the prejudice of his own kith and kin. If the kith and kin had been a man he would have wasted thousands in contesting the will; being a woman the kith and kin not only resigns fortune, but is thankful to do so!"

"I am sure Mr. Smith's idea was we should share the fortune. It is in every way better—more suitable!"

"I refuse to share it! Take the money, and leave me my liberty! I believe you had some vestige of regard for Mr. Smith?"

"I had the warmest gratitude for him."

"Then you'll honour his memory best by making his relative happy in her own way. Just you go and spend the money, but leave her her freedom!"

"You are so young; your feelings might change! Besides, nothing can absolve me from my promise."

"How you harp on your promise! I thought men broke promises as soon as made!"

"Some men."

"Look here," said Miss Smith, irritably, "do you know you are much better than I expected? Just leave me alone! You go your way and I mine; but I'll promise not to think harder of you than I can help, and that if I can do you a good turn I'll let you know!"

Guy was surprised at the eagerness of her voice, the earnestness shining in her eyes. He began to dislike this singular woman far less than he'd done at first.

"And will you promise also, Miss Smith, to let me know if ever I can be of any service to you, and to let me help you as though," he bawled softly over the last part of his sentence, "as though you were my sister?"

"We're all brothers and sisters, I believe?" responded Miss Smith. "At least they say so in church. Still, I dare say you mean well, and I don't mind promising what you ask! Now, as I have a friend waiting for me, perhaps you will let me say good-night?"

As he shook hands with her he glanced keenly at the fingers of her disengaged hand, almost as though he expected to see her wearing a betrothal ring, but Miss Smith was utterly innocent of all such vanities.

She would have said herself, if asked the question, she scorned them. There was nothing for Guy but to depart.

He had done no good except assure himself he could not conquer Anastasia. That young lady might have added to the description she sent him of herself this fact, that she possessed one of the strongest wills ever encountered.

Left alone, Miss Smith opened a door half-concealed by heavy curtains, and called, certainly in a gentler tone than any she had used to Guy.

"Poppie!"

A small, fragile-looking creature came in answer to the summons—a girl the opposite in all respects of Mr. Forrester's maid, and one whom it was difficult to believe her friend. Yet a very warm attachment did subsist between the two, and so, in the hour of her greatest sorrow, the younger of the pair had claimed hospitality and kindness from Miss Anastasia Smith.

"Is it really over?"

"To be sure," said Anastasia, coolly. "My

dear, you are positively trembling. Did you think the young man would be violent?"

"I—I didn't know."
"I can manage anything," returned Miss Smith, modestly, "even men; and for one of the objectionable sex, Poppie, I am bound to say Mr. Forrester behaved quite decently."

"I am sure I should hate him."
"Just so, my dear; we hate all men, it's part of our creed. He seemed in a great way."

"He need not! You might have told him he was welcome to all the money if he left you in peace!"

"I did."
"And what did he say?"
"Talked about a promise and solemn vows. Poppie, either the young man must have a kind of monomania about truth or the promise was far more serious than Jabez Smith ever said."

Poppie looked into the fire.
"He actually asked me," went on Anastasia, "if I believed anything but death could absolve him from his promise."

The younger girl (if it be not presumption to class Miss Anastasia as a girl at all) shivered a little, and drew closer to the fire.

"I should like to have seen him, Stacy."

"Why, my dear, I wanted you to. Don't you know how hard I tried to persuade you, and you wouldn't hear of it?"

"I know," said Poppie, gravely. "Is he coming again, Stacy?"

"No, dear. I managed beautifully. I told him as he had all the money he could well afford me my freedom. I promised to do him a good turn if I could, and he begged me to send to him if I ever needed his help. He actually got quite affectionate, Poppie, and asked me to look on him as a brother."

"He had better have said as a sister," suggested Poppie, wickedly, "then you'd have adopted him on the spot. Where's he going, Stacy?"

"I have no idea."

"Didn't he tell you whether he meant to return to Maryland?"

"I never asked him. My one aim was to get rid of him; and really, my dear, I think I did it very cleverly."

"You're a wonderful woman, Stacy!"

"I'm not much compared to some women champions of our cause," said Stacy, modestly, "but I'd back myself any day against any man living."

These enemies of the nobler sex partook of tea and ate cold chicken and ham with as much fervour as is shown by their more feminine sisters for these edibles.

Certainly the friends were a contrast. Anastasia you know already, but Poppie deserves a description, for she was not only a marvel of graceful refinement, but she was gifted with a sad, wistful beauty which charmed many hearts.

She was small, below the middle height, and so slender as to look almost childlike. Her face was a perfect oval, and had a delicate mild-rose bloom; her eyes were dark velvety brown, and their long black lashes contrasted well with her fair skin; her hair matched her eyes, only it had a golden gleam in the sunlight. She wore it combed very high, and disposed in one long plait wound round her head, the front fell on her forehead in short, fluffy curls. She was dressed with scrupulous nicety in black, without any trimming at all, and as she wore neither crepe nor jet, the dark garb was doubtless assumed merely out of sympathy for her friend's recent affliction.

"I wonder what I shall do next?"

Miss Smith put down her cup with a jerk, and looked at Poppie.

"You'll stay here, of course!"

"Oh! I couldn't, Stacy. To begin with, I should be always in the way, and then I should be so frightened."

"What of? Don't you suppose I can protect you from everyone?"

"But how if Mr. Forrester return, and insists on protecting you?"

"He won't."

Poppie smiled.

"I am not going to risk it; and besides, Stacy, don't think me ungrateful, dear, but I couldn't stay for long in London; the air seems to stifle me."

Stacy gave a little sniff.

"Take my word for it, Poppie, you'll end by marrying. You haven't got the moral courage to keep men at a distance. Sooner or later you'll take one just to defend you from the rest—see if you don't!"

Miss Poppie smiled. Perhaps she feared the conversation was getting far too personal to be pleasant, for she skillfully turned it into another channel by suggesting the latest news of the "cancer" should be read aloud for her entertainment, and, as a proof of her interest, she went to sleep before Miss Smith had finished the first page.

Anastasia put the pamphlet down and watched her with what in another woman would have been tenderness.

Stern in all else, Miss Smith had one soft spot in her heart, one love in her life, and both were filled by Poppie.

She might scold her, reprove her, laugh at her, but for all that she would have sacrificed anything in the world to make her happy; and now as she noted the weary look on the sweet face a strange reproach filled her heart.

"I wish I'd never given in to the child. I shouldn't wonder if I'd done her as much harm to-day as though I'd been her bitterest enemy."

CHAPTER IV.

"AND what did you think of Miss Smith?"

"I hated her; but she conquered me, Mr. Fordred, and it's my belief no man could hold his own against her."

"Hem!"

"She is going to write to me if she ever wants anything; and meanwhile I have promised to let her alone."

"The best thing you could do. It will be her wisest course to marry Jim. He's a steady-going fellow, and I must say, in spite of her turning the garden-hose on him, he is devoted to her."

Since he had seen Anastasia Guy could fully believe this little incident. He felt rather a sympathy for the ill-used woe, but he gave the uncle no opinion of his having better success if he tried his luck again.

"After all, things are better as they are," ruminated the young man as he went to bed that night. "It would have been a most trying position for both of us, and Anastasia certainly seems able to take care of herself. I shall put aside half the old man's property for her use, and send her the interest every year; but it won't do to hand her over the principal, or she would be cajoled out of it in a week by the strong-minded harpies by whom, of course, she is always surrounded."

This was a virtuous resolution. Guy decided after a week in London he could go to Ardmore, and put in an appearance at the Castle as a pleasant surprise to his uncle.

There would not be the slightest need to mention the episode of Anastasia Smith to his noble relations. That could be his own secret now and ever.

He had been nearly the week in London when an impulse of gratitude made him visit the grave of the man who regarded Anastasia as perfection.

It was a singular taste, but, poor old man! she was his only living relation, and perhaps she had not always been so plain.

Guy came to this charitable reflection after a careful survey of the simple marble stone inscribed to the memory of Jabez Smith.

Then, as the short October evening was closing in he turned towards the cemetery gates, thinking, from the deserted aspect of the walks, it might be near the hour of closing.

Guy was not learned in the rules and regulations of cemeteries; he knew, of course, that the pretty lodge at the gates was occupied by a caretaker, but he never dreamed this individual was only at his post by day, and returned to spend his nights in a less melancholy locality.

When he reached the gates he found to his horror they were locked, and, after one or two prolonged shouts, he came to the conclusion the guardian had locked up his little place and departed.

What was to be done? A notice faced Guy declaring the cemetery closed at dusk, and it was certainly dusk now.

He had no just cause for complaint; he had read the printed warning as he entered, but Mr. Smith's grave being in somewhat a remoter part of the cemetery than he had expected his pilgrimage had been longer than he counted on.

The present emergency had never even dawned on his imagination. He thought the cemetery caretaker a fixture; that he could basely desert his post, locking any living creature among the departed, seemed too dreadful an enormity for the venerable old man, with his white beard, to have been guilty of.

What was to be done? Guy quite contemplated scaling the railings and thus effecting his escape when he became suddenly aware he had a companion in misfortune.

A young girl had come up and stood reviewing the fast locked gate with a very perplexed face.

Guy's first instinct was compassion for her evident distress; his second, indignation at the carelessness of her friends in letting her be there alone.

She looked a mere child, a fragile-looking creature, whose tear-stained cheeks told even more plainly than her crepe-trimmed dress that she had recently lost one very dear to her.

Guy hesitated one moment, and then spoke. Raising his hat as respectfully as if she had been a princess, he inquired,—

"Do you think there is any chance of the man's returning? I have been looking at his little box, but it seems shut up for the night."

"I am afraid it is. I think I must have forgotten the time."

"Nearly seven."

"Ah, and the gates close at half-past six! How stupid of me! But I was thinking, and the time went so fast!"

Guy's heart was touched. The tears trembled in the girl's soft eyes, and he could see plainly she was in trouble.

"I am a stranger here. I never even saw the place before. Can you suggest any way of extricating us from this dilemma? I need not tell you my services are quite at your disposal. Perhaps you know the place well, and are better aware of its resources?"

"I know it very well. Old Thomson has gone for the night; he will not return."

"Good gracious! And what are we to do?"

"It is easy enough for you," said the girl, with a little emphasis on the pronoun. "You have only to go to the part of the cemetery where the ground is highest, and it will be quite simple to scale the wall."

"And you?"

She looked dubious.

"I really don't know."

"Couldn't I summon help? That old Thomson you spoke of—could you give me his address, and I would get the keys, and release you?"

She shook her head.

"He lives miles away—at Lambeth."

"But you can't stay here all night!"

"I don't think I should mind."

"You would catch your death?"

"What would it matter?"

"Don't talk like that!" said Guy, earnestly.

"I can't bear to hear you. Don't you know you are so young life must hold many good

things for you? You may have lost someone near and dear to you, but in time you will form new ties."

"Never! Besides, new ties can't replace the old ones. Old friends are best."

"You have lost your mother?"

"And my father, too. Do you wonder the world feels blank, and cold, and desolate to me?"

"Your relations ought to feel ashamed of themselves for letting you be so miserable."

"I fancy that is my affair. But you are mistaken; I have not a single relation in the world."

"Poor child!"

"Don't!" said the girl, softly; "he always used to call me that, and I can't bear to hear the name from anyone else."

Of course she meant her father. Had he been long dead? and had he left his child poor and needy as well as friendless?

"Have you lost him long?" asked Guy, simply.

"Nearly three months. People tell me I ought to be getting over it; that he was old, and it is natural for the old to be taken. But I cannot see that; he was all I had to love—my very all!"

"But surely you have friends?"

She smiled, and for a moment her face was lighted up with a rare beauty.

"I have one friend. She is all that is good and true, and I love her dearly; but he cannot be forgotten now. It is not safe."

"You speak as though some danger threatened you. Surely you cannot mean to imply that you have an enemy?"

"I have an enemy, one foe from whom I must hide myself for all time; and my friend is not well or great. She is only just a simple working woman, and if she had to keep me with her it might cost her more than you can understand—so I am going away."

It was a strange conversation, but then the place and scene were strange, too. The girl spoke in simple trust. Guy listened with an interest he could not hide.

"And where are you going?"

"To seek my fortune."

He shuddered.

"Don't say that."

"Why not?"

"You are such a child, and the world is full of pitfalls and snares for the unwary. Oh! child, why can't you stay safe with your friend? Better any petty hardships than the perils the world holds for such as you."

She smiled again, only this time more sadly.

"I must go! I could not stay with my friend. It would not be safe, and I do not feel afraid. I have known so much trouble in my life I don't think there can be any fresh to come!"

Guy wondered whether she had known the fitful fever men call love, and if so, whether she counted that among her troubles; then he recalled himself by an effort to the exigencies of the moment.

"As you say, I can scale this wall easily, and I am sure I could help you out if you would let me."

"I should be very glad," said the girl, frankly; "for my friend will be getting anxious. You see, I am going away to-morrow, and this is our last evening together!"

"You are really going, then? You have quite settled your future?"

"Quite. I am to be a kind of governess and companion rolled into one. It sounds very dull, but it will be respectable."

Yes, it would be respectable, but his heart ached for the girl; she looked such a pretty fragile creature to undertake such a bondage.

"And you like the idea?"

"I don't like it, but I shall be safe from my enemy. I must think of that."

"I can't understand you having an enemy; it sounds impossible!"

The girl shuddered from head to foot.

"Oh, a long time ago, but I never looked

at his face. I shouldn't recognise him if I saw him."

"But he would know you."

"Oh! I hope not. I was quite young then. I must have aged since."

"You talk as if you were Methuselah."

"I feel like it."

He smiled.

"Now if you had spent seven years in a tropical island and come back to find yourself forgotten and utterly alone—to find yourself looked on as a kind of old fogey by your own contemporaries, then you might have some excuse."

"Are you like that?"

"Yes. I went out there years ago a young man, and, really, I don't feel very much older, but all the people I meet seem to look on me as middle-aged."

"I used to think I would go abroad. What kind of place where you at?"

"Maryland Islands. Oh! not a bad colony; rather small, and often a great deal too hot, but very pleasant."

The girl stole one glance at his face, then she seemed lost in contemplation of her own feet as she said, slowly,—

"I have heard a great deal of Maryland."

"From whom? It is a place where everyone knows everyone else. If you have friends there I must know them."

"But I haven't."

"You said you had heard a great deal about it; at least I understood so?"

"I have been taught to fear it. My enemy lives at Maryland."

It was quite possible. Guy knew perfectly well there was an outer circle of society at Maryland made up of the very worst adventurers of England.

He knew that this circle, who never ventured to cross the threshold of Government House, and whose past would not bear investigation, were most of them men who had come from England in hot haste to escape a felon's doom—men who were reckless of all so that they kept their freedom.

Some of these men were now naturalised citizens of Maryland, wealthy and prosperous, yet with a turned-down page in their lives, and a suspicion of evil still hanging to them, which made the fathers of marriageable girls give them a wide berth.

He knew all this, and decided in his own mind if this fair child's enemy was one of these men, she had, indeed, cause to fear him!

A dead silence, then the girl said, simply,—

"But Maryland is a long way off. When once I have hidden myself I shall be safe! After to-morrow the clue will be lost, and I shall be able then to hear the place spoken of without a shiver!"

Guy sighed.

"I hope so."

"You speak seriousness—almost as if you knew them."

"I know there are some men at Maryland I would rather see wife or sister of mine dead than know at their mercy."

"Have you got a wife and sister?"

"It was only a figure of speech. I never had brother or sister."

"You might have a wife! You look to me quite old enough."

"I was old enough twelve years ago, but age is not everything. My life is well-nigh as lonely as yours can be!"

"Only you have not an enemy."

Guy might have answered he possessed what was almost as detrimental to perfect happiness—a secret; but they had now reached the point where the climbing the wall presented the least difficulty, and he concentrated his attention on conveying himself and his companion in safety to the other side.

She was alight and agile, a mere feather's weight; and when Guy took her in his arms to lift her to the ground it seemed to him the moment in which he so held her was shorter than other moments.

A few seconds more and the two stood together in a dull suburban road, with the

cemetery they had just quitted on the one hand and a terrace of grim, semi-detached houses on the other.

"I should not like to live here," said Guy's companion, with a smile. "I wonder they are not driven melancholy mad."

"Perhaps you prefer London?"

"I hate London! I'm staying there now, but I never mean to live there."

"It is far too late for you to think of going home alone. You must let me see you safely to your friends."

"But I'd rather not. I couldn't think of giving you so much trouble."

"It is no trouble. I am returning to London myself."

"And she wouldn't like it."

"Your friend?"

"Yes," confessed the girl, simply. "She would say I was very wrong to have let you speak to me; only, you see," naively, "I really couldn't help it. Besides, I fancy if you had not spoken to me I should probably have had to pass the night in the cemetery; but Stacy is very particular."

"I see. She is older than you."

"How could you guess that?"

"I don't know. And she is unmarried, and probably detests men."

"You must know her! You could not describe her so exactly if you didn't."

"I have met others like her. Now, you must let me decide this matter for you. It is much too late for you to return alone; but if you are so soon to leave her it would be unkind to annoy your friend. I will escort you to Victoria Railway Station, and see you safely into a cab."

She assented at once, and Guy found himself wondering how to discover her name. He could not be quite content to let her pass out of his life.

"Bah!" he muttered to himself, "the best thing that could happen to her! What good could come of her knowing me? I might do her a worse injury than the enemy in Maryland she looks on with such mysterious awe!"

They talked very little in the train. The girl leant back in her corner as though tired out.

It was only when Guy had put her in a cab the thought they were parting for good and all occurred to her.

"Good-bye," she said, gently, and her voice gave the sweet old Saxon words a charm they had never borne for Guy before. "I shall never forget how good you have been to me! I wonder if we shall ever meet again?"

"I hope so. Meanwhile won't you tell me by what name I may remember you?"

She half-smiled.

"I have a horrid, old-fashioned name; but everyone calls me Poppie."

"Poppie! It just suits you! I shall not forget."

He stood bareheaded until the cab was out of sight; then he seemed dimly conscious something had passed out of his life.

He turned into the theatre, where he had secured a stall to hear Irving, but even the tragedian's spell could not drive that fair-haired girl from his thoughts.

How little he knew of her! Just that she was alone, and had an enemy! She had lost her father, and was to be a governess. Her name she would not tell him, but everyone called her Poppie!

From these brief materials Guy built quite a pathetic little history. He found it more interesting than the play, and left before the piece was half over.

"What an idiot I am!" he muttered to himself, "at my time of life to be taken captive by a girl's eyes! I should have thought my wretched secret would have made me a little more sensible! Perhaps it's a good thing for me I am not likely to see that pretty child again! I might be forgetting my promise to old Jabez Smith, and accepting his granddaughter's somewhat peculiar opinion that his death had absolved me from it!"

(To be continued.)

A GOLDEN DESTINY.

—30:—

CHAPTER XIX.—(Continued.)

"You are a foolish, headstrong girl," said Mrs. Henry, closing the window, and returning to her seat. "And you must take the consequences of your rashness. You will not be guided by me, therefore you shall learn the truth. Your mother was my elder sister, and your father was notorious all over England for his crimes—a burglar, a forger, a coiner. I do not think there was a single branch of wickedness in which he was not an expert. More than this, when he pretended to marry my sister he had another wife living, so that you have not even a right to the name by which you are called. Now do you understand my desire to keep your existence a secret?"

Poor Irene's face had grown whiter than the thorn bloom upon April hedges, and she shrank back with the movement of one who has just suffered a physical hurt. And, indeed, no blow, however hardly dealt, could have pained her as did those cold, cruel words, which came upon her like a black cloud, behind whose darkness the sun has gone down.

Although she had never known a mother's love, she had had tender dreams of what it might be, and the disillusion was terrible.

At the moment she did not doubt its truth, for it furnished a satisfactory explanation of the manifest desire held by Mrs. Henry to get rid of her, without letting the world become aware there was such a person.

Perhaps Mrs. Henry was touched by the white misery of her face, for she said in a softer voice,—

"I would have spared you this if it had been possible, but your own folly is to blame for the revelation. Why could you not yield yourself to my judgment? If you had done so you might have gone to Australia, and begun a new life among people who would never have known your shame, and there would have been every prospect of happiness for you. But, there, the mischief's done now, so it is no good wasting words over it. Perhaps it may be a lesson to you in the future."

Irene put her hands before her eyes, and for a few moments did not speak. She was so young, so innocent, so ignorant even of the world's wickedness, that the agony of her humiliation was almost greater than she could bear.

It seemed to her, that, from all humanity, she had been chosen to bear the most terrible burden of shame, and the sense of it actually bewildered her.

"Of course," added Mrs. Henry, "no one need know of this except our two selves, and if you are wise you will go to Australia to the situation provided for you, and make up your mind never to look upon England again. It is the only plan open to you so far as I can see, and although you have accused me of wishing to get rid of you, I have really been acting for your good all the time. I do not deny that I had no wish people should know of your connection with me, for I am in service, and have always been respected and thought a good deal of. No disgrace has ever blackened my name so far, because when my sister died I took possession of you, and so no one ever knew the truth of the matter. As for your father—well, he died in prison, where he was serving out a sentence of penal servitude."

"Oh, hush—hush!" cried Irene, in piteous entreaty. "Tell me no more; I have heard enough, and I cannot bear it—I cannot bear it!"

"The best thing for you will be to go to bed, and have a good sleep," observed Mrs. Henry, briskly, as if, under present circumstances, such a blessing as sleep could come to the stricken girl. "Let me help you to undress."

Irene suffered her to unfasten her clothes,

but did not speak a word, and when she was in bed Mrs. Henry left the room, quietly bolting the door on the outside ere she descended the stairs.

She was not a woman to neglect precautions, and as it was not unlikely that Irene might take it into her head to leave the house, she thought it as well to provide for such a contingency.

At the bottom of the stairs she paused in indecision, and thought for a few moments, her eyes betraying some perplexity.

On re-entering the sitting-room, she found it occupied by James Marlow alone, his mother having gone to the nearest public-house on an errand that may be left to the imagination of the reader.

"That's a pretty girl of yours," observed the man, thus showing in what direction his thoughts had been running.

"Yes—pretty enough."

"What relation did you say she was to you?"

"My niece."

"Ain't much like you," he said, with a grin that was hardly complimentary to the lady addressed.

"No, she features her father, who is dead," returned Mrs. Henry, composedly, and then she drew from her pocket a sheet of paper and a pencil. "I want to send a telegram. Where is the nearest office?"

"You can't send it to-night; it's too late. But I'll take it for you first thing in the morning if you like."

She thanked him, and then wrote her message.

It was addressed to "Mrs. Seymour, Woodleigh Court, W—shire," and it contained these words,—

"Shall not be able to return as soon as I intended. Have had some trouble with my niece, but think things will work smoothly now. Vessel does not sail for two or three days. Don't expect me till afterwards."

"There," she muttered, as she finished, "it is better to be on the safe side."

And perhaps it was for this reason that she did not entrust Mr. James Marlow to send the telegram, but got up early the next morning and took it herself.

CHAPTER XX.

MARJORIE WYNDHAM was not one of those shilly-shallying people who are blown about by this and that opposing current, and when she had once said a thing it generally followed that she kept her word, no matter at what cost to herself. Therefore the morning after their interview in the garden, when Geoffrey came to her and said,—

"Your father told me I should find you here, and gave me hopes that you might look more favourably on my suit—"

She interrupted him with a quick wave of the hand.

"If you still wish it I am willing to become your wife," she said, with quiet, if cold, decision.

"I do wish it; it is the one desire of my heart. Oh! how can I express my gratitude to you—"

Again she interrupted him, and this time with a slight contraction of the brows that might have meant either pain or anger.

"You will please me much better by saying nothing at all about it, and perhaps when you have heard what I have to say you may not think the favour I confer upon you a very great one, for I tell you candidly that I feel for you neither love nor liking."

"It will come!" he interpolated, eagerly.

"I am willing to wait, because I know it will come."

"I am by no means certain. Indeed, my opinion is in quite another direction. However, the risk is yours, and if you are willing to accept it, there is no more to be said."

"I am quite willing, and you have made me very happy."

He bent down to kiss her hand, and although a quick shiver of repulsion thrilled through Marjorie's veins at the touch of his lips, she suffered the caress in passive silence, and then Geoffrey—wise enough to see he had better not intrude his presence upon her any longer—quietly left the room, a smile of exaltation lighting up his features as he reached the hall.

"Everything comes to him who waits," he muttered to himself, "and after our marriage her love will come to me. I am a lucky fellow! Wealth, position, and a beautiful wife! What more can any reasonable man want?"

Meanwhile Marjorie had leaned out on the window-sill of the morning-room, where the fresh, sweet incense of rain-washed mignonette came in puffs to her nostrils, and the gloire de Dijon roses that grew up the house nodded gently against her cheek, swayed by the soft, south wind.

"I wonder if good can come out of evil?" she murmured, half aloud. "Surely if I save my father from a miserable poverty, my sacrifices will not have been in vain."

And then she sighed, and thought of life as she had pictured it, glorified by Roy's love. How bright and delightful it had seemed!—how divine a glow had rested on that future which they were to share together!—and how dull, and grey, and sunless it looked now!

Well, other women had suffered besides herself, and there was no reason why she should be exempt from the lot of humanity.

Wise philosophy! But the young heart cannot be satisfied with philosophy, when it yearns for love!

That same night, after all the Wyndham Abbey household had retired, Mr. Geoffrey Wyndham let himself out with a latch-key, and after sauntering quietly across the lawn with the air of having just come out for a stroll, cast a rapid glance around, in order to assure himself that he was unwatched, and then threw away his cigar, and walked at a pretty quick pace towards the Lodge, at the entrance of the wood.

Arrived before it he paused, and looked up at the windows. In one of the lower ones a light was burning, and, shining through the crimson blind, it sent a ruddy patch of light on the little garden in front, and helped to guide the visitor up the narrow strip of pathway in the centre.

He knocked gently at the door, accompanying his knock with a peculiar whistle, which seemed to be recognised, for the door was immediately opened by Mrs. Fanning herself.

"Oh! so it is you," she observed, letting him in.

"Of course it is; who else should it be at this time of night?" he rejoined, rather testily, closing the door and relocking it, and then seating himself in the single armchair the room contained, while the mistress of the house stood opposite, her arm resting on the low mantelpiece, and her eyes fixed intently on his face.

She was, as the Squire had said, a handsome woman, of a somewhat foreign cast of countenance. As a matter of fact she was half Spanish, and resembled her dark-eyed mother much more than her English father.

"Well," she said at length in Spanish, "has the plan succeeded?"

He looked up with a start.

"The plan? Oh, yes—you mean the letter. By the way, Isabel, that was a very clever idea of yours, and I admire you immensely for it. I wonder Mr. Roy Fraser does not transfer his affections from Marjorie Wyndham to yourself."

"Perhaps he will. Who knows?" she rejoined, with a careless shrug of the shoulders.

"He is a nice young fellow, and once or twice I have really felt qualms at playing him such a trick. You may laugh, but it is the truth, nevertheless."

"Your qualms come rather late in the day,

ma belle. When conscience and self-interest are at variance, I observe it is almost always the latter that triumphs. As I explained to you, it was for our mutual good to get him out of the way, for he is an inquisitive young gentleman, and might have given us trouble if it had been to his interest to do so. As luck would have it, the Squire saw him walking down the path with you, and told Miss Marjorie, who did not take the news in good part by any means. You possess a great gift in your mesmeric powers."

"Yes, but it was with the greatest difficulty I contrived to get him to let me put him under their influence."

"How did you manage it? I have not heard any of the particulars as yet."

"Well, I saw Mr. Fraser passing the cottage, and called him in. At first he was unwilling to enter, but he is too courteous to like refusing a lady's request, so at last he came in; and then after a little conversation, I told him, in a casual sort of way, that I had seen Miss Wyndham drive by that morning, and one of the gamekeepers had told me she was on her way to Woodleigh Court, where she was going to spend the day with Miss Seymour."

"I could tell from his look of disappointment that he had been counting on seeing her, and after that he seemed in no hurry to leave, for of course he thought he had come on a fool's errand, and there was no chance of his getting a word with Miss Marjorie. He asked me a dozen questions about her—whether I had seen her, how she looked, and if you were still at the Abbey, and I answered them all quite candidly, and asked him to stay to lunch."

"He refused at first, but I pressed him hard, saying I wished to ask his advice on my own affairs, and pleading that I was a stranger in a strange land, and at last he yielded. Then I led the conversation round to mesmerism, and he said he did not believe in it, so I asked him to let me try my powers on him; and as I had surmised, he proved a very good subject, and sank into a magnetic trance almost immediately. It was while he was in this trance that I dictated the letters which he wrote."

"And when he awoke, did he know anything about what had happened?" inquired Geoffrey, who had followed the recital with every appearance of interest.

"Nothing whatever. He was rather confused, so I led him out into the fresh air, and put my hand on his arm to steady him. It was then that the Squire passed."

"And thought from your attitude that you must be lovers!" chuckled Geoffrey. "A splendid joke, was it not? After that, I suppose the young man returned to town?"

"Yes! He said he had some business letters to write for the night's post, and of course, after what I had told him, he fancied there was no chance of seeing his lady-love. Still," added Mrs. Fanning, with some remorse, "I did not like the job, for he had been kind to me, and it was an ill return to make."

"Pshaw! my dear Isabel, you are growing much too conscientious. The matter stands thus. I have acquired an influence over the Squire, who has been advised by his lawyers not to resist my claim, and who will do a good deal for the sake of retaining peaceful possession of the Abbey during his lifetime. Marjorie, on the contrary would fight the matter out to the bitter end, and if, by any chance, it should come into the Law Courts, it is just possible, that perfect as my proofs seem there might be discovered a flaw in them, and that flaw would not only deprive me of the Abbey and its lands, but would place my liberty in jeopardy for the next twenty years. Do you understand?"

She nodded, with an expression of intelligence in the great dark wells of her eyes.

"Marjorie is only a girl, and cannot therefore act on her own responsibility," he continued, still watching her intently, as if it were of some importance to discover her mental attitude while he spoke. "Besides, she is devoted to her father, and would do

nothing in opposition to his wishes. But we all know how quickly a girl changes under the influence of love, and you may be sure Mr. Roy Fraser would not have let her inheritance go from her without a struggle. He might even have persuaded her into a secret marriage, and that would have been a great blow to my plans"—how great an one his listener did not guess—"for if he had once acquired the right of interference he would immediately have set himself a task of investigation, which might have been very disastrous so far as I was concerned. Therefore our little plan was absolutely necessary, and really Fate seems to have aided us."

"But did Mr. Fraser never write to the girl?"

"He did, my sweet Isabel; but the girl never got the letters."

"You stopped them?"

"I did," he returned, with an evil smile, "and I am sure you will admire my industry and perseverance, for I always contrived to look over the contents of the post-bag, both before it went out and before it came in; and when there chanced to be a letter for Marjorie in a gentleman's handwriting, and with a London postmark on the envelope, I took the liberty of abstracting it. The matter was rather difficult at first, but practice makes perfect, and eventually I found it the easiest thing in the world."

"You are a villain, Jim!" she said, and he bowed, as if in acknowledgment of a compliment.

"So that I am a clever one what does it matter?" he demanded, with supreme indifference.

"You are a villain!" she repeated, deliberately, "and I sometimes think that if you treat other people so infamously what guarantee have I that you will not treat me the same?"

"Have I not given you my love, Isabel?" he asked, moving, however, rather uneasily under her searching gaze.

"Your love! What is it worth?"

"It is hardly for me to say," he returned, with an affectation of humility; "but so far it has been true."

"Has it?" she retorted, dryly. "I am sometimes more than inclined to doubt it. Still, I think you are too cautious to dream of playing me false. I am not the sort of woman to be trifled with, as you are quite well aware, and if you *did* try to throw me over—"

She paused expressively, and he leaned forward with some eagerness.

"Well," he said, "suppose I *did* try to throw you over—what then?"

"I should *kill* you!" she hissed, between her set teeth, and her whole face became instinct with an almost fiendish determination.

"Do you see this?" She drew from her breast a small and finely-chased revolver. "It was my mother's; it has upon it her initials, 'R. F.'—Rosina Fanning—and she gave it me on her dying bed. 'It is the best protection a woman can have,' she said to me while the death-dews lay on her forehead, and I have religiously preserved it ever since."

"Don't talk in that melodramatic fashion, Isabel!" he exclaimed, with a forced laugh, although his face had grown of a sickly yellow colour. "It would be a stupid sort of revenge to kill me, when you would be pretty sure to be hanged for the crime."

"And do you think I should care one iota for that?" she said, with passionate scorn. "I assure you the fear of being hanged, even if it were a certainty, would not stay my hand from revenge. But why have you asked me this question?"

"Simply out of curiosity—nothing else. You are surely not growing suspicious of me?"

"I don't know," she returned, with a vague uneasiness. "Sometimes doubts will come, whether one wishes it or not, and your manner changes occasionally."

"Never to you," he said, getting up and

kissing her on the cheek. "Have I not often told you you are the most beautiful woman I ever met?"

"So often that I have grown to doubt whether you mean it," she answered, a sneer curling her finely-cut upper lip; then, with a change of tone, she added, "I tell you, Jim, I have borne this kind of life quite long enough. I am sick to death of it, and I will bear it no longer! Why should I consent to be mewed up in this horrid little place, away from my friends—away from the sunlight—away from you? My proper place is by your side, and it is time I assumed it!"

"Was it by my wish that you came here?" he demanded, sullenly.

"No, to do you justice, it was not," she replied, with a short laugh. "For when you quitted Australia you took every pains to leave no clue to your destination!"

"I should have sent for you, when matters had arranged themselves."

"Should you? I very much doubt it; but that is not the point at present. I showed you I was not to be shaken off so easily, and though there were many difficulties in the way I managed to track you to London, and then down here!"

"And once here, there was no getting rid of you," he muttered, below his breath, and he half-turned round, so that she should not see the expression of baffled malignity, that came in his eyes at the remembrance.

He was recalling the day when he met her in the wood, and she had candidly told him she had come to Wyndhamstowe for the purpose of watching him, and finding out what he was doing.

So taken by surprise had he been, that he had told her a good deal of the truth, and then implored her to help him, declaring that when his position was secure, he would present her to the world as his wife.

"And you will promise to go through another matrimonial service with me?" she had said. "I am quite aware that the ceremony performed in Australia was not legal, and I shall not be satisfied until we are married in an English church by an English clergyman."

Of course he had promised. He would have promised anything, rather than arouse her anger, which might have proved fatal to his hopes for the future; and then it had struck him that he might make use of her woman's wit, which had helped him in the past, and which could help him now.

We have seen the result, and its effect on Marjorie, which had proved exactly what Geoffrey's foresight had predicted.

But when we make use of edged tools, the greatest possible caution is necessary, lest they should happen to cut the fingers that handle them, and this was what Geoffrey feared in the present instance.

He knew his companion of old—knew that she was utterly reckless of consequences when passion took possession of her, and knew as well that if she once suspected his relations with Marjorie, her wrath would be like the rushing waters of a mountain torrent, which sweeps everything before it in its headlong career.

And yet nothing was more likely than that she would hear of their engagement, for when once it became known it would spread like wildfire in the quiet little village, where gossip was welcomed in whatever shape it came. It therefore behoved him to prepare her mind; but although, physically, he was no coward, he trembled and hesitated at the task before him, and would fain have deferred it had deferment been possible.

"How frightened you looked the day you first met me, when you were coming out of the wood!" observed Mrs. Fanning—as she called herself; "and it was not the sight of me that scared you either, for before you set eyes on my face you looked as white as a ghost!"

"I was scared," confessed Geoffrey, "and when I found out you were in the neighbourhood, I fancied I had you to thank for my

scare. Are you quite sure—quite, quite sure that it was not you who spoke the old name by which I used to be known, while I was standing under the copper beech-tree?"

She shook her head in very positive negation. "No; I told you before, when you asked me, that I had not been farther in the wood. I don't know why you should doubt me," she added, cynically, "seeing that I should gain nothing by telling you a lie!"

"That is true," he said, smiling grimly; but the smile departed almost immediately, and was replaced by an expression of anxiety. "There is something mysterious about the episode all the same, for I am ready to swear I heard that name repeated three times, and there is certainly no one about here who ever knew me by it!"

"It was fancy. Your nerves were upset, and so you fancied you heard it."

"It was no fancy, of that I am assured. However, it is useless dwelling on the matter, as there is no prospect of its being cleared up; and, besides, I want to talk to you on rather an important subject. Fortune has, so far, favoured me; but at the same time I know I am embarking on a perilous enterprise, which will require all my skill to bring to a successful issue. Failure, as you know, means ruin."

"I suppose this is the preface to asking for my help in some way?" she observed, satirically.

"You are right, as usual. In fact, it rests with you to say whether I shall conquer Fortune or not. I do not conceal that I want you to make a sacrifice; but, Isabel," and his arm stole round her waist, and his lips pressed her cheek, "you have hitherto proved yourself so devoted to my interests, and so willing to aid me, that you could hardly fail me now, and I have every confidence in your love!"

"I don't like the beginning, Jim Stone," she said, abruptly, and drawing herself away as she spoke. "It sounds false—it has the ring of having been made up some time ago, and thought over before you committed it to words!"

"Don't render my task harder than its own nature makes it," he exclaimed, imploringly; and it was clear that he was considerably taken aback by her penetration. "Heaven knows I regret, to the bottom of my heart, that I should have to utter such a proposal to you, but there is no getting over necessity. Listen," and he lowered his voice, that even the walls might not overhear his communication. "You know that there is a flaw in my claim to the Wyndham estates, and if that flaw were discovered there would be an end to the claim. Now, although it is improbable, it is not impossible that someone should turn up who may play the deuce with my proofs, and in that case I should have to fly, without a sou in my pocket, and we should be worse off than before. There is one way by which all risk of these unpleasant consequences may be averted, and wealth positively secured."

"What way is that?"

"I hardly like to tell it you," he said, hesitating. "For though I should be able to give you as much money as you liked to spend, I should not be able to acknowledge you as my wife. In fact it would necessitate my making another woman my wife."

"What?"

He took her hands, and held them firmly in his own—so firmly, that all her efforts were powerless to draw them away.

"Now be reasonable, Isabel. What I am suggesting is for your sake, as well as my own, and, in reality, it will fall harder on me than on you. I shall make a most liberal settlement on you, and see you constantly; but, in order to assure my position, I must marry Marjorie Wyndham!"

CHAPTER XXI.

LORD DUNMORE, mindful of his promise to Mrs. Seymour, lost no time in having the

promised "talk" with his son, and during the conversation, strongly impressed upon him the necessity of at once making an offer to Ermentrude.

The young man listened in silence, and when his father had finished speaking, said,—"I suppose I have no alternative but to propose to her?"

"Certainly not," returned the Earl, in some surprise; "in fact, I made quite sure you had already done so until Mrs. Seymour undeceived me, and I must confess that your conduct has been blameworthy in putting it off so long."

It was in the library that this conversation took place, and St. Croix went to the window, and began drumming restlessly with his fingers on the panes.

Lord Dunmore followed him.

"What is the matter, St. Croix? Is the prospect of this marriage distasteful to you?"

"Most distasteful."

"Then why did you not say so before matters had gone too far for you to withdraw honourably?"

"Because I did not know myself."

"Since when have you known?"

"Only within the last few days," responded the young man, in a low voice, while his cheek flushed beneath its tan.

"Does that mean you have bestowed your affections elsewhere?"

"It does."

The Earl was silent for a few minutes, and evidently deeply agitated by the communication.

"I am very sorry, Harold! very—very sorry, my boy!" he said, at length, calling his son by his Christian name, a thing that very rarely happened. "It will fall hardly on you, but I do not see that it can possibly make any difference as regards Ermentrude, whom you have compromised by your attentions."

"Then," said St. Croix, but although he put the question he knew beforehand what the answer must be, "you think I am bound to marry her?"

"I am afraid there is no alternative."

The Earl did not ask who was the object of his affections, or where he had met her. He had a keen and most delicate sense of honour, and would have looked upon such questions as an exhibition of vulgar curiosity, unworthy of a gentleman.

St. Croix, on the other hand, refrained from telling him, because he was aware that it would of necessity, have been a shock for his father to know that he had given his heart to the niece of Mrs. Seymour's maid!

"There is no more to be said," he observed after a pause. "I will see Miss Seymour at once, and put an end to the matter."

And with that, he went out of the library, and crossed the hall to the morning-room, where he knew Ermentrude was alone, writing letters.

When he entered, she had apparently finished her correspondence, for she was leaning back in her chair, with her hands clasped idly on her lap, and St. Croix was absolutely startled at the expression of her face.

She looked positively despairing; her cheeks were white, her eyes lustreless, and her lips set together in a thin tense line. Totally unlike her usual brilliant self, it was as if a mask had been suddenly dropped from her features, revealing the struggling, passion-torn woman beneath.

But she was a perfect actress, and even while St. Croix stood at the door, hesitating whether to retreat or advance, she started up, and called a smile to her lips. The colour came back to her cheeks, the brightness to her eyes, and she was once more the Ermentrude of society.

The change was so rapid as to be little less than marvellous, and the Viscount almost doubted if his first impression had not been a mistake, and he himself the victim of a delusion.

"Are you going to write letters?" she

asks gaily. "If so the writing-table is quite at your service, for I have finished mine."

"No, I came for the purpose of speaking to you."

"Indeed! That sounds ominous. I hope you have nothing disagreeable to say?"

"I hope not either; that is, I trust you will not find it disagreeable," said St. Croix, taking a seat by her side, and feeling more thoroughly wretched than he had ever felt in his life before. "I do not think there is any necessity to beat about the bush, Ermentrude, for you must be aware of the object that brought me to Woodleigh Court, and I may as well come to the point at once. Will you be my wife?"

It was an abrupt sort of wooing, but if his life had depended on it, Harold could not have perjured his lips with love vows which were false; and, as it happened, she greatly preferred this style of courtship.

She did not answer immediately, but bent her head, and played abstractedly with a flower in her belt, a scarlet pomegranate blossom, which she pulled to pieces petal by petal.

Once she looked up suddenly and clasped her hands, and seemed on the point of confiding some secret to his keeping, but as suddenly changed her mind, and resumed her former position.

"Well, Ermentrude," said St. Croix, presently, but there was no passion in his voice, only a feverish unrest, "what answer have you to give me? Will you accept me as your husband?"

"Yes," she replied, "on one condition; namely, that you do not press for a speedy marriage."

"What do you mean? It would probably be as well that we should be married in six or seven months."

"No, no! That is much too soon. A year will be quite early enough."

"As you like," he returned, rather surprised at this somewhat strange proviso. "I do not wish to press you against your inclinations." He paused, and then drew a case from his pocket, out of which he took a circle of diamonds—magnificent gems—which flashed back the sunlight in a thousand rays of starry points. "You must let me place this ring on your finger. It has been the betrothal ring of my family for centuries, but I do not think it ever rested on a fairer finger than the one it graces now."

Perhaps the compliment was intended to cover his own lack of warmth, and, if so, it succeeded perfectly, for Ermentrude's vanity was always her strongest point, and a pleased smile played round her lips, as she held her finger to the light and watched the brilliancy of the gems, with their glittering, prismatic radiance.

Maybe her ideas went even farther, and she saw in imagination the caskets containing the far-famed Dunmore diamonds, and speculated on the sensation she should make when she appeared at Court wearing them.

The papers would be full of her praises; the clubs would re-echo with the murmurs of admiration her beauty would provoke; she would be the theme of the hour, and the shop-windows would be full of her photographs!

Not a very pleasing prospect for most women, but to this one it represented a perfect Paradise of delight, dashed, however, by a cold fear lest she might never enjoy it.

St. Croix imprinted a cold kiss on her forehead, and thus the betrothal was sealed.

Afterwards, he went to inform Sir Travice of what had happened, and was heartily congratulated by the Baronet.

"I am delighted to think that you will, in a sense, become a relation," Sir Travice said, as he shook hands with him. "Your father and I have always been dear friends, and I look upon you almost as a son. If," he continued, with a sigh, "Heaven had blessed me with a son I should have liked him to resemble you. Of course, it is an understood thing that Ermentrude is my heiress, so you will in time become master of my estates, and

those, added to your father's, will make you one of the richest men in England."

St. Croix expressed no elation at the prospect, neither did he feel any. It seemed to him that a cottage, however humble, would have given him a happier destiny if Irene could have shared it with him.

"The news you have just given me has determined me to make my will without delay," pursued the Baronet. "It is a duty I have put off from day to day, and week to week, but it is one that I have really no right to postpone, for the sake of Ermentrude, so I will go to Blackminster this very afternoon, and give instructions to my lawyer to prepare the draft immediately."

At that moment Mrs. Seymour came in, and her appearance saved St. Croix the embarrassment of a reply.

"Alicia!" said Sir Travice, with an unaccustomed gaiety in his voice, "I have just received from St. Croix a very joyous communication. He and Ermentrude are betrothed!"

A quick flash of joy came over the face of Mrs. Seymour, and she exclaimed impulsively,—

"Is this true? Oh! I am so glad—so glad!"

"And I, in recognition of the event, intend going to my lawyers to-day, and giving instructions for my will to be prepared," added Sir Travice.

Greatly to his surprise his sister-in-law burst into a flood of tears. As a rule she was an extremely self-possessed woman, who very rarely gave vent to her emotions.

The fact was, however, that her nerves had lately been strained to their utmost tension, and the relief given her by these two pieces of news was so great as, for a few minutes, to actually overwhelm her.

"Forgive me!" he said, recovering her composure. "I ought to be—and am—deeply ashamed of myself for this outburst, but the assurance of Ermentrude's good fortune, and the certainty of her future happiness being secured, overcame me. I will reserve my felicitations for another occasion, Harold; and also," turning to the Baronet, "my thanks to you."

"I did not know her feelings were so deep," observed Sir Travice, as she disappeared.

"However, I think all the better of her for such a display of weakness. She is a strange woman, and though I have known her so many years, I cannot say that I entirely understand her even yet."

True to his promise, he rode over to Blackminster after luncheon, Ermentrude and her betrothed watching his departure from the open French windows of the morning-room.

"What a pretty horse!" observed St. Croix, looking after the glossy, well-groomed chestnut on which the Baronet was mounted.

"Has Sir Travice had him long?"

"No; a month or so, I believe. He bought this one and another at the same time, and they are so exactly alike, that even the groom could not tell the difference, if it were not that this one has a white star on its forehead, which the other has not. They are called Castor and Pollux."

"Very good names for them!" returned St. Croix.

"Yes, and they would be a most valuable pair, but that Pollux is so frightfully vicious that no one cares to risk riding him. Sir Travice won't sell him, but he is practically useless, for he never leaves the stable except when he is taken out for exercise, and then he is led by a groom. By the way," added Ermentrude, carelessly, "would you like to ride over to Wyndham Abbey this afternoon?"

Harold assented, and went to order the horses. He had, that day, made a discovery with regard to the man he had seen at Wyndham Abbey when he called on Marjorie, and it amounted to nothing more nor less than the certainty, that the *soi-disant* Mr. Geoffrey Wyndham was the self-same person, from

whose rudeness he had protected Irene, on the occasion of their first meeting on the Embankment!

CHAPTER XXII.

WHEN Irene woke up the morning after her conversation with Mrs. Sumner it was with a vague sense of pain, which became intensified when she remembered the substance of the communication made to her the night before.

Her head ached, and her pulses throbbed; but the physical suffering she could have borne much more easily than the sick pain at her heart, born of the knowledge of her shameful antecedents.

Her very innocence made the burden heavier, for to her there was no degree in sin. Sin itself was a hideous monster, which nothing could palliate, dimly known, but loathsome even in its obscurity.

Once, thinking over all Mrs. Sumner had said, she was inclined to agree with her that the best thing she could do would be to go to Australia, and there escape the odium that in England must rest upon her because of her birth; but an instinct stronger than reason made her shrink from trusting herself in an entirely unknown land, amongst entirely unknown people, and perhaps—though she did not confess it—the fear that if she went to the Antipodes she would never again set eyes on St. Croix, helped to make her repugnance to leaving England more intense.

Mrs. Sumner was already up and dressed, so Irene made haste to get her toilette completed, and then descended to the parlour, from whence came the sound of frizzling bacon, an operation that was being performed by Mrs. Marlow, although, as she, with much dignity, hastened to explain, she kept "a girl" to do the dirty work.

Frying bacon not being included in the dirty work the girl was not supposed to be worthy of its performance; and indeed, when Irene saw her, she was not surprised that she was debarred from the honour of cooking, for her hands, looked as if they had not been washed for a month, and her face matched them.

Still, in spite of this, in spite of her rage and her filthy apron, and her slouching gait, there was an expression of half-pathetic humility on her features that touched the young girl, and made her smile kindly at the despised and hard-worked "slavery" who rejoiced in the name of "Euphemia."

The day passed without incident. Mr. Marlow left the house in the morning, and did not return till night, and his mother spent her time chiefly in the kitchen, so that her visitors were left alone.

Mrs. Sumner, however, did not return to the attack. She was a wise woman, and knew that too much persuasion might prove a great deal more injurious than too little, so she let her words have time to work.

"Could we not go out somewhere?" Irene said, on the third day. "I am getting to long for a mouthful of fresh air."

"Fresh air is a luxury Londoners do without," answered Mrs. Sumner, grimly, "and we should have to go too far to get away from the houses. No; on consideration, you had better stay indoors."

Irene said no more, for she knew that further entreaties would be useless, and so the day dragged its weary length along, and when night came she retired to her room, pale and weary, and miserable.

Mrs. Sumner followed her after a little while.

"Well," she said, "have you made up your mind about the voyage? Marlow's vessel starts the day after to-morrow, and he has already prepared you a comfortable berth and cabin."

"I am not going," the girl replied, calmly. "I will get a situation in England, and promise never to trouble you again; but I will not go across the seas."

Then followed a repetition of all the argu-

ments Mrs. Sumner had before made use of to endeavour to make her change her resolution, but all to no avail, for Irene remained firm, and at last Mrs. Sumner desisted from sheer weariness, and the conviction that nothing she could say would prove of any avail.

"Ungrateful girl!" she exclaimed, as she left the room. "Disobedience is the return you make me for all the money I have spent on your education at the convent ever since you were two years old."

Irene made no reply, and her aunt's face wore a very uninviting expression as she joined the Marlows downstairs.

"What, has the young lady been troublesome again?" asked James Marlow, to whom Mrs. Sumner had, of course, confided her wish that Irene should have a passage in his vessel across the Pacific. "Does she still refuse to come out in the *Anna Maria*?"

"Yes, and is not likely to change her mind," returned the woman, moodily.

Marlow uttered an oath which need not be recorded.

"I'm blessed if I would be defied by a chit of a thing like that!" he exclaimed. "If she won't come by fair means, I should try the other way—that's what I should do."

Mrs. Sumner was silent for some time, then she suddenly asked,—

"Is the *Anna Maria* bound to sail to-morrow?"

"She is, at twelve of the clock precise. The tide will suit then, and fifty pounds wouldn't make me miss it."

"Twelve o'clock," she repeated, musingly.

"Is there a moon?"

"No, the moon don't rise until four o'clock."

"Then it will be quite dark?"

"Dark as pitch."

She nodded as if pleased.

"Why do you ask?" said the seaman, helping himself to some whisky. "What's your little game?"

"I was thinking that we might contrive to get the girl on board without its being noticed. Do you think it possible?"

"Quite possible, provided she don't holler."

"I shall take care of that," observed Mrs. Sumner, significantly, and with an evil smile.

"Drugs?"

She nodded without replying, and the man looked meditatively at his toddy.

"It's a risky game if it's found out," he remarked.

"But it won't be found out! How long shall you be getting out into the channel?"

"That depends."

"You will be towed out by a steam tug, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"Well, it seems to me that it won't be difficult to keep Irene quiet by means of opiates until after the tug has left you, and it will not matter what she says afterwards, for you won't stop again until you get to Melbourne."

"Look here," said the man, presently, "I'm quite willing to make an honest penny by taking the girl over the sea; but the action of opiates is uncertain, and I'm not going to put my neck in danger by administering them, so if they are to be given her you'll have to do it yourself."

"Very well," Mrs. Sumner returned, after a slight pause; "then I will come on the *Anna Maria* until she is in the Channel, and then the tug can take me off. Now, about the other arrangements."

They drew a little nearer to each other, and began to speak confidentially—Mrs. Marlow having by this time left the room—and before they parted a bank-note for a considerable amount had passed from Mrs. Sumner's possession into that of the sailor.

"And remember," she said, "more will follow when you have once landed in Australia, and taken the girl up country."

"All right, missus. Seems to me you are uncommon anxious to get rid of the young lady."

"That is my business," she responded, coldly, and with a slight contraction of the brows.

"Certainly, certainly! and so long as I get my money it is nothing to do with me. You needn't be afraid that I shall interfere. I know better than to poke my nose where it isn't wanted, and to keep a quiet tongue in my head so long as I am paid for doing it."

And with this the pair of worthies separated for the night.

The following day passed in the same fashion as its predecessors, except that Mrs. Sumner went out in the morning for half-an-hour, and during her absence Mrs. Marlow remained in the room with Irene, keeping—as the young girl suspected—a watch upon her movements.

Indeed, there could be no doubt that she was virtually a prisoner, for the slightest inclination on her part to go outside the door was met with a sharp command from Mrs. Sumner to stay where she was, and she knew that resistance on her part would be more than useless.

As was natural under the circumstances she felt miserable and ill at ease, and a strange presentiment of some coming calamity lay upon her like a spell, which she was powerless to shake off.

Perhaps the secret of this might have been found in the mistrust with which she regarded Mrs. Sumner, and the instinctive belief that she was cruel and unscrupulous in the means she took to compass her ends.

At about nine o'clock James Marlow came in from the docks, and was met in the tiny passage by Mrs. Sumner.

"Is everything all right?" she asked, her voice betraying her anxiety.

"Yes, so far as I can tell, and in all probability when we get to Dover we shall have a fair wind, so that the tug will be able to leave us. Have you got the luggage ready?"

"Not yet. I was afraid to fasten up the box lest she might suspect something, but it will not take me five minutes to do that after she has drunk the coffee. I am going to prepare it now."

He nodded intelligently, and soon afterwards Mrs. Sumner reappeared in the parlour, with a tray, on which were placed cups and saucers and a coffee-pot.

"As you're going away to-night I thought I would make you a cup of coffee," she said pleasantly to the sailor. "Will you have one too, Irene?"

The girl answered in the affirmative, being, as a matter of fact, very glad of the offer, for the day had been warm and stuffy, and she had grown thirsty since her mid-day meal.

Mrs. Sumner poured her out a cup, and handed it to her.

"What is the matter?" she asked, presently. "Don't you like it?"

"It—it tastes rather bitter," replied the young girl, with some hesitation.

"Bitter! Nonsense! It is all your fancy. The coffee tastes all right, doesn't it, James?"

"Quite right—its very good."

"Perhaps there may be rather too much chicory in it," admitted Mrs. Sumner, tasting the liquid in her own cup, "and that would account for its being a little bitter, but it's nothing to hurt. You are too particular, Irene."

Irene, who was extremely desirous of not deserving the implied censure, hastily drank up her coffee, but soon afterwards rose, and moved hastily towards the door.

"What is it? Don't you feel well?" asked Mrs. Sumner, rising too.

"Not quite—a little giddy—nothing to hurt," was the incoherent response. "I will go upstairs and lie on the bed, and I daresay I shall be all right directly. Pray don't trouble to come with me."

"It's all right," observed the sailor, after the young girl had left the room. "In ten or fifteen minutes' time she ought to be firm asleep, and then you can pack up, and we'll take the traps down to the vessel, and get them safely stowed away before you and my lady come aboard."

(To be continued.)

JAMIE AND JEAN.

—o:—

JAMIE and Jean had plighted their troth, In summer when both were young and fair, And together they walked, and together they talked,

Oh, they were a happy pair! But Jamie was out of work, and he Had made up his mind to cross the sea, And nearly broken was Jean's poor heart At the thought that she and Jamie must part.

Ill-luck had Jamie; the times were hard; And 'twas useless for him to plan and plot; And his wedding-day seemed far away;

Oh, his was a lonely lot! But he said, "I will not write to Jean How scant are the fields in which I glean, Lest she should worry and fear that I Should come to grief 'neath an alien sky."

Jan was happy and full of hope, Though oft she wiped a tear from her eye; For Jamie she knew was fond and true, And would send for her by-and-by. But neighbours whispered that Jamie might Be false to his vows, as he didn't write; Said Jean, "I will know the truth;" so she In search of her lover crossed the sea.

As soon as the vessel struck the dock In the port where Jean had so longed to be, Her courage all fled, and she wept as she said: "Oh, nobody waits for me!" Crowds of people were on the pier, Ready with greetings for friends most dear, But not a face or a hand was seen Eager to welcome the homesick Jean.

Just as she stepped from the gang-plank down, Ah, who should meet her and greet her there But Jamie! And he cried as hard as she,

Though they were a happy pair! And they were married that very day, And good-luck came to their door straight-way; And never were any king and queen Quite so contented as Jamie and Jean.

J. P.

OH! GIVE HIM BACK TO ME!

—o:—

CHAPTER XXXI.

WHO IS THE SPY?

LADY JANE ARMITAGE in a beautiful dress of old gold brocade and velvet was standing in a corner of the Countess of Oldthorpe's splendid ball-room with the Hon. Bertie Mayne.

There was no love lost between them, and yet each had tried to be especially agreeable to the other, perhaps because they were so terribly bored in consequence of the absence of someone else.

"The word hatred ought to be expunged from the English language," said Lady Jane, unfurling her feather fan. "We never have the energy to hate—dislike is the utmost we can manage in these days of cold calculation."

"Perhaps a cold hatred is the most deadly of all. The one that calculates and waits—waits on from year to year. You could almost fancy the arm uplifted, and the dagger already in the hand," said Bertie, slowly, a quiet smile about his lips in spite of the gravity of his words.

Lady Jane affected to shiver. "You put it so graphically, it sounds as if you were drawing on your own experience."

"I am, to a certain extent—my own experience of others. Is there anything deadlier than a woman's feeling for the unfortunate girl who cuts her out?" with a swift glance from under his eyelashes.

A slight shade of colour stole up into Lady Jane's cheeks.

"In penny-dreadfuls the rival, I believe, is generally stabbed or poisoned."

"And in real life the same sort of thing goes on, only without the knife or the strychnine."

"In real life tragedy is the exception."

"Do you really think so?" turning round, the better to watch her face. "Do wives never break their hearts because women will flirt with their husbands?"

"How can I tell?" with a nervous laugh. "I never was a wife, so my heart is not in danger."

"Then, you see, I can generalise without offence," still watching her closely. "The women who belong to the predatory tribes will have something to answer for. If I had my way, the present Calcraft—I forget his name—should try his hand on them."

"Mr. Mayne!" opening her eyes in horror.

"I mean it," an angry light shining in his own. "They are rank cowards—for the wife is so defenceless! If she tries to avenge herself by a little flirtation on her own account, there's a 'view halloo' at once, and the pack in full cry are after her."

"Then I'm sure some hares like to be hunted," trying to shake off the uncomfortable impression produced by his manner.

But immediately a vision of Violet rose before her, and the reports she had so sedulously fostered.

For the future she felt she would involuntarily think of her rival as a poor helpless hunted hare, on whose trail she had started the eager hounds.

"Oh, yes! and pheasants like to be shot. We shouldn't do it, of course, if they didn't!"

"Now, that's absurd! A man's pleasure is to be considered before a bird's."

"Of course; and pleasure rules the world."

"Now, Mr. Mayne, confess—you are straying from your original subject. Are you capable of a fierce hatred yourself?" turning round to meet his glance with a playful smile.

"I am, Lady Jane," was the prompt response. "There is one man living whom I could see hanged, or skinned, or crushed to death, and feel the fate too good for him?"

"You can't mean it?" with a little laugh.

"Have I ever seen him? Do I know him?"

"Report says you have seen him rather oftener than his wife."

"Mr. Mayne!" with a gasp, as a flood of crimson poured over her face to the very roots of her hair. "I—I can't conceive whom you mean!"

"No, I suppose not," very quietly; "report generally lies. I knew you would be the last woman on earth to stand between a man and his wife."

"Most certainly. I—I hate that sort of thing."

"You must. You and your brother pull very well together, don't you?"

Instantly she was reminded of Ralph Armitage's absurd infatuation for Violet, and her heart sank within her with an overpowering sense of shame.

Was it true that she and he, true brother and sister, were trying to drag the unfortunate girl down to the lowest depths of woe?

"Pretty well—as well as most. That is to say, he comes to me fast enough if he thinks I can help him," she said, with affected carelessness.

"That is very convenient, for then you can play into each others' hands," with an innocent smile, as if he had no such thing as a dark insinuation in his mind. "But take my advice and don't go too far, Lady Jane. Edged tools are interesting playthings, but the sooner they are dropped the better."

"Certainly; I don't like cutting my fingers. Why should Ralph and I have a liking for edged tools?" her eyes wandering over the brilliantly lighted drawing-room, as if in search of some excuse for an interruption.

She had always had a fancy that Bertie Mayne might be rather nice. He had a higher standard than most young men, and she had a sort of idea that to be approved by him was

as good as an order of merit; but now he was talking so oddly that she would be thankful to get rid of him.

"How can I tell?" he said, in answer to her question. "Only I warn you that those who employ edged tools against me or mine," with a significant emphasis to show that he really meant his sister, "will find their own fingers cut before they know it."

"I don't understand why you should warn me!" haughtily, though she understood so well that every word made her feel uncomfortable.

"Of course I used 'you' in the general sense. According to what you told me just now your conscience must be perfectly clear, or I could not have mentioned the subject. I don't often speak of my sister, but I feel impelled to confide in you to-night," with a pleasant smile. "Do you know that I am as sure as possible that some woman has got between her and her husband—not in the vulgar sense," as he saw her brows drawing together. "I believe she has got hold of him somehow, that she acts as a spy on Violet's actions, that she perverts every innocent friendship into something dangerous, that she eggs on another to join in this dirty game; and between them they convince Sartoris that my poor sister, instead of being an angel of the celestial sort, is one of the fallen ones; instead of being the model wife that any man ought to be proud of, is one of the fast fraternity, who find every male amusing except their own husbands!"

She looked up at him, murmuring something confusedly, as she wondered if she must take it to herself, or if she could safely ignore it. A sudden thought struck her in the midst of her confusion; perhaps he might know where Jack Sartoris was, and end this gnawing anxiety.

"If you find out the woman show her no mercy, Mr. Mayne," she said, eagerly; "for I am sure she will deserve none. I only wish that Mr. Sartoris were here, to hear with his own ears, and see with his own eyes. You don't know where he is?"

Bertie Mayne could have laughed aloud at the naivety of the question, but he remained as grave as a judge, and said quietly: "No I don't. You can't tell me, can you?"

"I? How should I, when even his bankers know nothing?"

"Do you mean to say you were kind enough to ask them? We ought to be grateful for the interest," with a sharp look that belied the simplicity of the question.

"I didn't ask," colouring deeply. "But my brother did, and the answer was that they had seen nothing of Mr. Sartoris since he last went down to Farnham Court."

"He must have drawn a cheque or two. That is the only way I believe they'll ever find out if he is in the land of the living."

"It seems he drew out a considerable sum before he went."

"What a prey for a pickpocket! Shall we take another turn, Lady Jane? You waltz so divinely."

Lady Jane did not dare to offend Bertie Mayne, so she agreed, and soon they were lost in the gyrating crowd. If her feet had been as heavy as her heart, Mr. Mayne would have had some difficulty in dragging her round the room, for he was no Hercules, and he disliked much exertion. He had enjoyed stabbing her quietly behind her moral mask, and he now chose to dance with her, because he was sure that she did not like it.

"Bertie looks as if he were really enjoying himself!" Lady Stapleton remarked, with a placid smile; and so he was, but after a fashion peculiar to himself.

He knew that Lady Jane felt as if he had half skinned her, and he thought over the process with a smile of intense satisfaction. She was an admirable partner, and their steps went very well together, but she gave a sigh, as of intense relief, when the final chords of the music came, and he took his arm from round her waist.

"A capital spin!" he said, with an attempt

at enthusiasm, "I felt as if we were a pair of twins, long separated, come together at last."

"I didn't," she said, breathing quickly. "I have nothing in common with you, nor you with me. I think it must be time for supper."

"May I have the honour of taking you in?"

"No, thanks. I am pledged to the veriest bore in the whole room. I was wondering where Ralph was."

"I'll go and hunt him up," with a low bow he departed, and Lady Jane breathed a devout "Thank Heaven!" He had stung her conscience, he had wounded her self-respect, he had ruthlessly dragged her back-slidings into the light of day; he had let her see in the plainest way that her hidden treacheries were known, and might any day be exposed before the world. Oh! where could she hide herself when the storm came? She had no husband, behind whose strong arm to shelter herself. Her brother, by common report, was no doubt implicated in the same thing, therefore could be no good to her.

Dozens of persons must have seen how his restless eyes were always seeking the door until Lady Stapleton came sailing in with a young girl in her wake, whom she had promised to chaperon, and Bertie Mayne's close-cropped head bringing up the rear. If he had just lost all his relations by one swoop he could not have looked more tragic; and she could have shaken him for being such an idiot as to take the whole roomful into his confidence. His voice had been quite hoarse as he said, with angry eyes fixed on Lady Stapleton's smiling face,—

"May I ask why Mrs. Sartoris hasn't come?"

"My niece is unfortunate enough to have a headache, and begs to be excused."

"She might have said something else," he replied, with a sneer. "Headaches are played out, aren't they?"

"I wish they were. Ah! Lady Oldthorpe, how lovely your rooms look!" and the widow turned her back serenely on Mr. Armitage, whom she was certain by this time that she couldn't endure.

By her advice Violet had accepted the invitation in order to avoid persecution; but she never had the slightest intention of facing another meeting with Ralph Armitage so long as it was possible to avoid it.

"I wish I were dead," said Lady Jane, petulantly. "I don't believe there's anything worth living for," and yet the next moment she was forcing herself to smile as sweetly as she could on a young millionaire, with an empty head and a well-stocked purse, whom she was thinking of honouring with her hand—some day when spinsterhood had become intolerable.

Bertie Mayne started on his search for Ralph Armitage, and found him moodily meditating behind the curtains draping a window. He tapped him on the arm to attract his attention, and laughed at the nervous start he gave.

"You might be a pickpocket and I a policeman," he remarked, with a smile. "Your sister wants you."

"Oh—ah—thanks!"

"By-the-bye, have you ever heard anything of that fellow St. John?" Bertie asked, on the spur of the moment, reminded of Holly Bank by the sight of Armitage's face.

"No, he never was a friend of mine. Why should I?" his face pale as death, his eyes wild and restless.

"Don't know," carelessly, "but if I were a friend of his I'd have the Crannock dragged. I bet you a fiver he's at the bottom of it!"

"Good heavens! Will nothing convince you?" speaking angrily to conceal his agitation. "The porter swore he went up to town."

"I daresay; but just drop me a line if you come across him. I don't know why—but, somehow, I take an interest in him. You are not looking well—what's up?"

"Nothing; only bored to death. I think I shall slope," walking towards the drawing-room, and wishing Mr. Bertie Mayne—a good-looking, irreproachable young man, the hope of mothers with marriageable daughters—at the very bottom of a quite inaccessible sea!

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE STRANGER AT THE INN.

WHEN Ralph Armitage went to bed that night his brain was on fire. It seemed to him, in his wild and reckless passion; that to live any longer without the woman he loved was impossible. He could not exist for another day in this state of uncertainty without doing something towards ending it.

What that "something" was to be, he would tell to no one. He would have hidden it even from himself if that were possible, but at least he could conceal it from his sister.

The next morning, having slept scarcely ten minutes, he started out to do a great deal of business. About noon he was to be seen in St. James's-street, chatting pleasantly with any one who came up for a minute's gossip, and informing everyone he came across that he was running down into the country for a few days' shooting.

"Lucky fellow!" said one, who was hurrying off to the Treasury—one or two hours late as usual. "Not tied to a desk as I am—take it out at Easter, see if I don't!"

"Going to the Forresters, I suppose?" said another, with a twinge of jealousy. "Awful shame to think I'm tied by the leg!"

"What are you thinking of? The Colonel's in town," rejoined Armitage, and then with a nod he walked on, not having mentioned his real destination.

That evening he sent for a cab, put into it a small and rather shabby portmanteau with his own hands, then got in, and was driven to Paddington station.

"Where to, sir?" asked a porter, already shouldering his portmanteau.

"Bless me, what a fool I am!" he ejaculated, impatiently. "I never meant to come here. I told the fellow to drive to St. Pancras!"

Another cab was called and started eastwards, but before he had gone more than half-a-mile the direction was changed, and Ralph Armitage was finally deposited at Charing-cross.

Very late the next night a fly drew up at the door of the "Lion d'or," Belleville. The inmates had apparently all gone to bed, for in that remote part of Anvergne the hours are primitive, but presently a night-capped head was thrust out of a window, and an animated colloquy ensued.

The result of the colloquy was that the door was soon opened by a figure in a dressing-gown, whose oddly-shaped oil-lamp cast a broad ray of light on the traveller's face.

M. Simon saw an English gentleman with dark, piercing eyes and a bushy, brown beard, and as a visitor at that time of year was either a miracle or a godsend, a voluble welcome was extended to him at once, and he was absorbed into the ray of light, portmanteau and all, in the space of a minute and a half, whilst the driver, anathematising everything but the liberal fare he had just received, turned his tired horses towards the dark and dreary road, feeling as if he were shut out from paradise—for the paradise of the cold and hungry must be any place where there's food and warmth; of the weary, where there's rest; of the lonely, wherever a friend's face smiles a welcome.

"Write your name in our visitors' book, monsieur, please," said the landlady, the next morning, as she deposited a large volume on the table of the little salon. "We have crowds in the summer, for the scenery around is magnificent, as monsieur can see for himself," with a wave of her hand towards the window, from which a splendid chain of snow-

capped mountains was visible through a shower of sleet. "But a visitor at this time of year is generally past praying for, and it is a blessing we do not wish to forget."

"You must write it yourself, madame," he said, as he turned the leaves over with a careless hand. "I hurt my fingers last night in the door of the railway carriage, and I couldn't hold a pen."

"Oh, but, monsieur, I will wait; there is no hurry."

"No, I don't know how long I shall stay. Write, and I will call it to you."

After a few protestations, Madame took up the pen, and wrote after his dictation; and when she had ended with a final flourish, she read out, in her queer French accent,—

JOHN HAYMOND,
of Paradise Court,
Devonshire.

"That will do; now I'll give you another address which you can put in your memorandum-book. I am fond of climbing inaccessible places, and I've often met with serious accidents, so I make it a practice to give the name of a friend or a relative to the people where I am staying, so that they may have some one to appeal to if anything happens to me."

"Oh, but, monsieur, for the love of Heaven, be careful," cried Madame Simon, with uplifted hands, "or I shall not have a moment's rest when you are out of my sight."

"Madame need not afflict herself if I roll from the top of the 'Eagle's Nest' into the valley below. Life isn't such a pleasant business that we need cling on to it with both hands."

"But, monsieur, we must all wait till the good Creator calls us."

"Yes! if we've got anything to live for. Now take up your pen, madame, and write—" slowly spelling the direction, "Lady Stapleton, 50 Brook-street, London, England. That's right," inspecting it. "You write a splendid hand. Is it a mistake, or have you really got some lakes which are worth seeing in the bosom of the mountains?"

"But it's no mistake, monsieur. Only just half a league from the end of the garden you climb Mount Pilate, and find the 'Devil's Saneapan,' which is so deep that no line has ever been found long enough to measure it. The story runs that a witch was drowned there, and when the storm-winds blow you can hear her shrieks; but my husband says it's the echoes in the hollows, but men never will believe anything they ought!"

"Women believe everything," said the Englishman, whom the reader must have already guessed to be Ralph Armitage; "so they make it even between them. You must tell me some of your legends, madame; the more horrible the better I shall like them."

Madame Simon was only too well pleased to comply, as her tongue had but little chance of exercise in the winter, except in raising the maids, or keeping her rosy-cheeked spouse in order. She sat down at Ralph's invitation, and poured out a budgetful.

There was the old miser who had his board in a cave of Mount Pilate, and let his grandchildren starve to death whilst he was counting his louis-dors. He was murdered by bandits, who stole his hoard, and left him, as an example to misers in the future, tied to a stake in the mountain side, where the vultures picked his bones, and the roaring winds shook his skeleton to pieces.

There was the murderer who was driven out of the village, and wandered about the mountains, living on berries and wild pears as long as summer and autumn lasted. When the winter came, and every drop of water was turned to ice, and every herb or berry hidden under three feet of snow, the priest found him one morning, when he went to early mass, lying on the altar-steps, frozen and starved, icicles a yard long hanging from his beard, his face, shrunk and withered, turned as if in a last wild prayer to the cross he had spurned in life.

"You can see his grave now, monsieur, in the corner of the churchyard. Father Antoine says a mass for the peace of his soul once a year for nothing. Ah! but the Father is the best man that ever had a flock to look after."

"Perhaps he's afraid of the man's ghost troubling him if he doesn't," remarked Ralph, with a cynical smile.

The thought haunted him that if these good people could find out his loathsome secret he might be hunted out into the icy snow like the senseless murderer.

When he was tired of weird stories, he asked a great many questions about the natural features of the country round.

"We suffer much from the cold, and a drop of water is worth its weight in gold. In summer we don't get it without much trouble because the springs are dry, and in the winter because they are frozen," said Madame, preparing to go, as she thought of the dinner.

Ralph's face grew thoughtful, as if he were solving a difficulty.

"I suppose the ice is thick on all your lakes, madame?"

"In general, monsieur; but this winter is so mild. You might draw a cannon across the ice and not break it, if it were like last year; but they tell me there is only a thin coating on the Devil's Saneapan. There are hot springs, you see, from the old volcanoes, and it is the only place where the deer have a chance of quenching their thirst. Would monsieur like an omelette for his *déjeuner*?"

Monsieur would like an omelette, and something more solid, in the shape of meat, and a bottle of Burgundy.

About three o'clock in the afternoon he called out. On his way he looked in at the little kitchen, and asked the shortest way to the top of Mount Pilate.

"Monsieur will not go there at this time of day?" Madame Simon asked, in horror. "It really is not safe—the path is slippery, and the night will be upon us before you know it."

"Make your mind easy; I'm only going to take a look round."

"Take Pierre with you, monsieur," pointing to a curly-headed boy, with a sharp saw face and intelligent eyes.

"Thanks, I'm an unsociable fellow, and prefer to be alone. Prepare that curious dish you mentioned for my dinner—I might be ravenous. *Au revoir!*"

Replacing his cap on his head, he walked out into the shower of sleet with a shiver.

Whilst Madame, left to herself, reflected that, considering the amount the English gentleman seemed to have eaten at luncheon, when more than half the bacon and a large part of the loaf had vanished, and only a quarter of the omelette returned downstairs, she had better prepare not one dish alone, but a dinner of several courses to satisfy the foreigner's inordinate appetite.

It was late when, after toiling up a steep pathway, Ralph Armitage, struggling against wind and chilling sleet, at last reached the piece of water which had earned the sobriquet of the Devil's Saneapan.

It was a onious place—a hollow cut out of the hard grey rock, which rose weird and awful on every side.

The hollow was filled with water of fathomless depth; the water was covered with a thin sheet of ice, like a piece of silver paper thrown over a vault of death.

The scream of a night-hawk, the roar of the raging wind, were the only sounds.

Ralph Armitage, white as the snow, stood and shivered, whilst thoughts of life and death followed quick on each other's heels through his troubled mind.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

LORD BELFEATHER IS TOO GOOD.

THE Haymarket Theatre was crowded from gallery to pit. There was not a vacant seat in the house, for it was the first night of a new

piece, and public curiosity had been stirred to an unusual extent by the circulation of various rumours about the leading characters of the drama. Some people whispered that well-known personages of modern society were hit off to the life. This was quite enough to fill the stalls and the boxes; others maintained that the piece would be a genuine success, the best production of a favourite author which sent a crowd to all the other available places.

In a box on the grand tier sat Lady Stapleton, Violet Sartoris, and Mr. and Mrs. Landon. Many eyes were drawn in their direction, and ardent glances shot through opera-glasses, for Violet was looking as lovely as ever, and Mabel like the sweetest of blushing roses. Their toilettes were very simple, Mabel in white, and Violet in softest grey; but they had an air which only belongs to those of good birth, and they attracted so much admiration, possibly because they did not look out for it.

"May I come?" was telegraphed as plainly as possible by the young Marquis of Belfeather, and was answered by a smile and a flutter of a fan, which brought him as surely as a beckoning hand in the course of a few minutes to the back of Violet's chair.

There he took up his post and never left it, rather to the disgust of Cyril, who had meant to have a long chat with his old friend. He had taken a small house in Chester-street, Belgrave, and had already formed capacious plans, in which both Violet and Mabel were to take a part. These were to be discussed in the intervals between the acts, and Belfeather was decidedly *de trop*.

Lady Jane, looking radiantly happy, as if she had just had an offer from the man she loved, or heard she had been left an enormous legacy, was in a box on the opposite side. A smile hovered about her lips as she sat there, and her eyes glittered as if with triumph.

Bertie Mayne would have watched her narrowly and said that she was decidedly up to mischief, only, unfortunately, he was enjoying himself immensely at a bachelor dinner at his club, and Lady Jane was safe from his vigilance.

Cyril was too absolutely pure-minded to suspect her capable of playing such an odious part as she had already with regard to Violet, or else he would have kept his eye upon her, and perhaps been startled by her expression. She looked as different as possible from the dejected Lady Jane, whose actions Bertie Mayne had submitted to a surgical examination.

There was a colour in her cheeks, not brought there by the blush of shame, a light in her eyes, that made them sparkle with unusual brilliancy.

She expressed herself delighted with the play, as well as with the acting, and made none of those carping remarks, in which she generally let off some of the bitterness of her spirit.

Lady Oldthorpe's worn face relaxed into a pleased expression under her daughter's influence, and she unbent to a certain extent with regard to the millionaire whom Lady Jane liked to reserve as the last trump to be played only in case of an emergency.

"Mrs. Sartoris, I'm going abroad," said Lord Belfeather in a judiciously modified tone, which yet could not quite be designated a whisper. "Have you any particular direction in which you wish me to turn my travels?"

"How could I? Only enjoy yourself as much as you can, and come back some day to tell us all about it."

"You don't understand!" and he looked vexed at his effort being taken for a mere pleasure-trip, when he was really doing something that was quite unselfish. "Have you forgotten the commission you gave me at 'The Willows'?"

"Oh! Lord Belfeather, you are too good!" with a little catch in her breath. "No, don't think of me, or bother yourself about it. It is quite hopeless, and I can do nothing but wait."



[BELLEVILLE.—THE STRANGER AT THE INN.]

"Wait, and waste the best part of your life! No that you shan't if I can help it," he said, in suppressed excitement. "Men addicted to sport are always knocking up against each other. I've friends in all parts of the world, shooting tigers, or grizzlies, or wild boars. I'll write to the whole lot, and tell them to keep their eyes open for your husband, and I'll start on my own hook as well. Only look happy when I come back," with his winning smile; "that is all I ask."

"No, Lord Belfeather. I'm not a monster of selfishness. I—I really can't allow it," struggling for composure.

"You wouldn't hurt me so cruelly? Well, I'll ask something else as a reward, and then you shall see that I am as selfish as usual."

"Ah! if you could only tell me of something I could do for you in return."

"Call me Belfeather when I come back," in the lowest of tones; "and consider me your friend."

"With all my heart. Oh! Heaven! grant you success," with trembling lips. "You remember what I said at The Willows?"

"Every word."

"There was no reason, tell him that. But what am I saying? Of course, you mustn't go. What would the Duchess say?"

"She would be delighted. Her one hobby is travelling. She says it opens the mind. Now, if she said the purse, I'd quite agree with her."

"Think of all you would have to give up!"

"It is better that I should go," his voice scarcely audible. "I—I might find my way so often to Brook street that I might become a bore."

She looked into his boyish face, intending to flash a swift denial, but she saw such fond and earnest admiration in his eyes that her lashes dropped on burning cheeks, and the words remained unsaid. And yet this boy was noble enough to start on a hopeless quest after her husband!

"Have you no other commissions for me?" he said lightly the next moment. "I've a

wonderful eye for a pretty bonnet; and as to gloves, no one can cheat me. Are you ill?" in a sudden tone of alarm.

She leant back in her chair, white and nerveless. The thought of a real active search for her husband, with the wild hope that it excited in her heart, was too much for her. Her heart throbbed at a galloping pace, and then seemed to stand still, whilst the bright lights in the chandeliers appeared to come nearer and nearer to her eyes.

"Let me take you out. You want a breath of air," said Cyril, who was always on the watch to do her a service. He helped her to rise, then drew her hand through his arm, whilst the Marquis opened the door.

"My dear child, aren't you well? I'll come with you," and Lady Stapleton got up quickly from her chair with an expression of great concern, whilst Mabel caught up Violet's cloak and handed it to her husband, asking him at the same time if she shouldn't come too?

Violet would not hear of their being disturbed. She would be all right in a minute; she begged them to stay to please her. But when she attempted to walk she found her legs so shaky, and her head so queer, that home and quiet were the only things she longed for. The Marquis flew on in front to find the carriage or secure a cab, whilst Cyril followed more slowly with Violet. He was wondering what it was that could have upset her.

Belfeather, for a youngman—and a tolerably new acquaintance—had been talking with unusual earnestness, and Violet had listened with rapt attention.

Cyril could have betted half-a-million that she could not tell him one smallest particular about the plot of the play.

It was strange, and it disturbed him in his chosen character of faithful watch-dog.

First there was that fellow St. John, who gained such an extraordinary influence over her, and this boy seemed to be following rapidly in the same line.

Had those terrible bouts of brain-fever changed her disposition entirely? He contrasted her present ways with the life of absolute seclusion at the Priory. Then she would not even ask him to stay for a friendly dinner; now she was ready to receive anybody.

True, she was now living under her aunt's chaperonage, which made all the difference; but the wish for solitude had gone, as well as that proud standing aloof from the world which he used to think made her so superior to the rest of her sex.

Though these thoughts were fretting him at the moment, his manner to her was as gentle and tender as possible.

He stood before her to shield her from the draught, looking down with kindly eyes into her white face to see if she were better, but taking care not to fidget her with constant questions.

There were plenty of people about, and the doors were continually opening and shutting again with a loud slam. Many amused glances were cast in their direction, and one young masher nudged another with the remark,—

"I'm dashed if that isn't a regular case of spoons!"

Cyril heard it, and glared at the speaker, but at the same time Belfeather came hurrying back, quite out of breath, to say that he couldn't see the carriage anywhere, so had been obliged to secure a four-wheeler.

"Lady Stapleton's carriage!" cried the hoarse voice of a linksman.

"I gave the name of Stapleton—thought it as well," whispered the Marquis.

Violet was handed into the cab, Cyril took his place beside her. Belfeather shut the door, darted one glance of envy at her escort, raised his hat, and went back into the theatre, having promised to see after the others.

A heavy sigh, followed by a muttered curse, broke from a man who was passing,—

"And that is the woman whom I fancied disconsolate!"

(To be continued.)



["THIS IS, INDEED, A SURPRISE!" THE CLERGYMAN SAID. "DID MY SISTER KNOW OF YOUR COMING?"]

NOVELETTE.]

PLUCKED FROM BURNING.

—30—

CHAPTER I.

"I AM afraid," says Mrs. Burnand, with an affectionate glance at her young companion, "I am very much afraid that I have done wrong in asking St. Paul Crayford to the house. I have heard your brother speak in terms of unmitigated contempt and condemnation of my poor favourite."

Haidee lifts her beautiful brown eyes to the elder lady's face.

"Is Mr. Crayford so terribly wicked?"

"So 'folks' say," with an inflection of sadness in her voice; "but I am tempted to believe he is not so black as they paint him."

"I had rather be wicked than vulgar," announces Miss Roundfern, with somewhat unnecessary emphasis. "Vulgarity in any form is unpardonable."

"Still, Haidee, I must warn you that Mr. Crayford is essentially a detrimental; the younger son of an impoverished nobleman, with scarcely anything (so it is said) to recommend him but his handsome face. Beggared in almost everything, with a sad, and in some respects a shameful past, he is, perhaps, not quite the companion your brother would choose for you."

"You are not going to send me away before the arrival of this interesting stranger?" questions Haidee, with a little laugh. "You have made me quite anxious to see and converse with him. And then, where is the need for Gregory to know of his coming?"

Mrs. Burnand sighs as she glances into the depths of the glowing fire. Years and years ago she had loved the young man's father; but he had merely played with her, won her heart to beguile a few idle hours, and then married a peer's daughter.

She had been a proud woman then, and so she hid her pain well, and six months after Lord Crayford's desertion married Mr. Burnand. He never guessed her heart was not his own; she was so good, so gentle, so anxious to please him in all things; so he mistook gratitude and affection for love, and was content.

When they had been married fourteen years he fell mortally ill, and, dying, he blessed her name. Then she found herself a rich but childless widow. And now nothing delighted her so well as to fill her house with young people, to labour with heart and soul to promote their happiness. It was she who had saved St. Paul Crayford from worse sin, who had helped him in a thousand ways, known only to a woman; and she who believed his redemption could only be effected by love.

Suddenly she roused herself from her reverie.

"Well, Haidee, I have warned you—what ever happens, remember that. Now I will see that his room is prepared. Will you come too?"

The young girl rises and goes with her to the broad oaken staircase, up which countless beauties and cavaliers have thronged through long ages, and they reach at last a large chamber with a quaint old fireplace, and dark panelled walls grotesquely carved. Already a bright fire illumines and warms the room, bunches of holly and Christmas roses are placed in every available nook and corner.

"I think it will do," says Mrs. Burnand. "I am always careful to have everything bright for St. Paul. Poor boy, he is positively his father's *bête noir*, and unless I cling to him he has not a friend in the world."

She stirs the fire into a brighter blaze.

"You must look your best to-night, Haidee, I won't have any girl outrival my little protégée, and I do hope the ball will be a success."

"It is sure to be that. I fancy, dear Mrs. Burnand, you don't know the meaning of

failure," and linking her arm in her friend's she goes downstairs just in time to meet the other guests returning from skating.

"You have missed some fine fun, Miss Roundfern," says one young fellow; "the ice is in capital condition, and the air frostily pure. Confess you are sorry you stayed at home?"

"I have been very well content," she answers, smiling. "Indeed, to-day I preferred the warmth of the fireside to the keen air you praise so highly. By-the-way, Mr. Black, another guest is to arrive presently—quite an interesting specimen of your sex. Would it not be well to look to your laurels?"

"Who is this fearful and wonderful young man?"

"Mr. Crayford, late of King's College, Cambridge!" watching him intently.

"Whew! I beg pardon, Miss Roundfern, but you startled me pretty considerably. I almost wonder Mrs. Burnand should introduce such a wolf into the fold."

"You know something about him, I presume?" playing with her watch-chain.

"A little, and I fancy he is not a desirable companion for girls. He is not only a *roué*, but that most detestable of creatures—a cynic!"

They turn together to the pretty, dainty room where Mrs. Burnand is dispensing four o'clock tea; there is a pleasant murmur of high-bred voices, and a great deal of innocent flirtation going on. All the girls are filled with thoughts of this night's anticipated fun of the charming costumes they will wear.

Haidee slips into her seat beside Mrs. Burnand, Mr. Black exclaiming it was a shame she should so desert him.

"My dear!" whispers the hostess, "he is a very worthy young man, and I fancy you could scarcely do better than permit his addresses."

Haidee's beautiful mouth curves scornfully. "I detest worthy young men, they are usually such ordinary creatures!"

The other sighs, thinking how impossible it

is to bring about her favourite purpose; how cruel to link this young, pure life with that of St. Paul Crayford. "And yet," she says to herself, "his redemption can only be effected by a good woman's love."

The evening wears on, the hall-room is all ablaze with lights, and odorous with the scent of many flowers; the musicians have arrived, and are busy "tuning up." Carriage after carriage rolls up to the door and deposits its fair burdens.

Haidee, radiant in white silk, with pearls about her throat and wrists, and twisted in the bronze masses of her beautiful hair, is as yet the cynosure of all eyes. She is standing chatting lightly to Mr. Black when their hostess approaches them, accompanied by a young man who is a stranger to her.

"That is Crayford; and, by Jove! Mrs. Burnand is bringing him to you?"

"Why not?" questions the girl, with a thrill that is half of curiosity, half of admiration, as in a swift glance she masters every detail of St. Paul's face and form.

He is a trifle below the medium height, well-knit and supple; the handsome face is somewhat worn, and a faint hectic stains the pallor of his cheeks. His eyes are intensely grey, shadowed by white lids and sweeping lashes, which impart an almost pathetic look to the whole face. His mouth and chin are firm, but the former is sarcastic; and his whole manner is that of one bored beyond endurance.

But now he is bowing languidly to Haidee, quietly ignoring Black's presence, and the next moment he has possessed himself of her dainty perfumed tablets, and is asking with supreme indifference which dances he may claim.

The girl is accustomed to homage, and a flush rises to her lovely face as she listens to his voice, meets the coldly critical regard of those deep grey eyes.

"I think," she says, with a pretty candour new to him, "that you do not care to dance; if so, why do you here yourself in this fashion?"

"It is good sometimes to mortify the flesh," he answers, with faint mockery in his smile; "and when one is at Rome, you know, one must conform to Roman customs."

"Not necessarily," hardly able to suppress her anger; "it is only the weak who are controlled entirely by their surroundings, who are led hither and thither by every varying breeze."

He looks at her with languid astonishment; then—

"You are somewhat of a philosopher, Miss Roundfern."

"Indeed, no," smiling in spite of herself. "I do not aspire to such a dignity."

"This is our waltz," he says abruptly, as the band breaks into the delicious notes of "Gone for ever"; then a little later, "You dance well."

"Thank you," with a mischievous gleam in her beautiful eyes. "It appears to me you are really following out your maxim, and doing in Rome as Romans do. A compliment is hardly in accordance with your character of cynic."

His face darkens.

"I spoke the truth only. And who told you I was a Diogenes?"

"A number of people. Why should you be angry? Have you not done your best to earn the character? You have no just cause for complaint."

"You are a strange girl. Did your brother enlighten you as to my past career?"

"No. I never heard him speak of you, and Gregory is not given to idle gossip."

"And to him I was the embodiment of all the vices," Crayford says, sneeringly. "He was the St. Simon Stylites, I the moral leper, unfit to touch or approach him."

"Why do you talk to me thus? I know nothing of you—that is, nothing definite! Why should you blacken or defend yourself to me, Mr. Crayford?" Haidee asks, distressfully.

"I don't know," carelessly, "unless, indeed, I would put you on your guard against me. Some fellow at King's once said, quoting Dickens' words, 'All the wickedness of the world is print to him' (meaning me)."

Haidee looks full into the dark, miserable eyes,—

"I am sorry for you," she says, simply; "for whether you are a *roué*, or a man much maligned, you are so unhappy as to call for pity."

"Let me take you to a seat?" St. Paul says, abruptly. "I know of a jolly one in the conservatory." Then, after a pause, "I beg your pardon; perhaps I presume too far, and you would prefer not to be seen with me."

She lays her hand on his arm.

"I will go with you." *Honi soit qui mal y pense!* and he leads her through the whirling throng to the cooler air and lovely shadows of Mrs. Burnand's unique conservatory.

He finds her a seat in a most retired corner shadowed by ferns and flowering plants, apart from the glare and noise of the hall-room; and as he stands looking down upon the girl's pure, fresh beauty, a dreadful yearning for lost joy, lost honour, comes upon him—all his old life rises before him in hideous colours, and he almost groans as he turns abruptly from her.

He has not been wantonly wild; he has suffered much, and at the hands of those he best loved. He has been the scapegoat of the family from his earliest years, and then, when the last cruel blow fell, he had thrown aside all hope, all sustaining pride, and sunk to the level of those he most condemned.

Ah! what bitterness of soul, what anguish he had passed through, and there had been none to help him in his hour of trial, for the mother he loved had long lain sleeping in the family vault. So little by little he had drifted apart from home and kindred, until now he stands alone in all the world save for his loyal friend, Mrs. Burnand.

As these thoughts fill the young man's mind he sighs deeply, and half-forgetful of his beautiful companion, bends his frowning gaze on the glowing blossoms around; but his heart is far away, and he comes back to the actual present with a slight start.

"Do you know much of Black?" he asks of Haidee. "And what is your opinion of him? You were talking very confidentially when I came upon you."

A demure look comes over the lovely face; but the sweet, brown eyes are mischievous.

"I think he is a little bit of a prig," she says.

"Pardon, is that a society phrase? My ignorance is culpable; but I have long been an exile to polite company."

The swift colour mounts to her brow, and an angry retort trembles on her lips; but with admirable self-control she answers,—

"I acknowledge the correction, Mr. Crayford. Slang is not admissible for women."

"And yet they commonly use it; to my mind the modern woman is a humbug."

"Pardon, is that a society phrase?" Haidee retorts, swiftly, and with an arch smile.

St. Paul breaks into a burst of laughter.

"By Jove! You smite me hip and thigh. You make good your claim to woman's wit. I am afraid, Miss Roundfern, you have found me a very disagreeable companion, but if I have said anything that could hurt or annoy you, I am sorry," and she does not guess how great a concession this is from the man beside her. But before she has time to reply a gay voice speaks her name, and she rises to meet Mr. Black.

"I have been looking everywhere for you, and thinking you intended cheating me out of my galop," he says, with unnecessary emphasis in voice and manner.

"Oh no, Mr. Black, there is honour amongst thieves, you know," and with a slight bow to St. Paul, she moves away, so radiant, so lovely, so far removed from him, that the unhappy man groans in his agony of spirit. Not that he loves her, for he is not one lightly

to love or forget; but her very freshness is a pain to him, her purity a reproach. Once he, too, had been full of hope, of high aspirations. Ah! that once, so long ago now, that at times it grows faint and dim as a day old dream; its loves and its yearnings have been buried out of sight, though never out of mind, and St. Paul at twenty-five is a disappointed man, a miserable cynic, afraid to trust or love, because love and trust have both been brutally slain; fallen very far from that lofty pedestal upon which he once had stood, stained and smirched, but, thank Heaven, not quite beyond redemption.

As the strains of melody float out to him, an angry look mars his handsome face, and with impatient strides he makes his way back to the house, up to his own chamber, thinking—

"Gaiety and I are at variance; I am best alone."

CHAPTER II.

"Turn a turn with me, Miss Roundfern; that fellow Crayford has monopolised you entirely," pleads young Black, as he comes upon Haidee, resting a moment upon a chair. "I declare I am positively envious, for there isn't another girl present who can compare with you in skating!"

With a faint blush and smile Haidee rises.—

"I am sorry you should feel yourself neglected," she says, gaily; "and I am quite ready to start if you please."

How beautiful she is! The cold, bright sun shines down upon her winsome face, makes her bronze tresses gleam like burnished gold, lightens the depths of her wonderful brown eyes.

The young man thinks there is none to rival her, and is proudly happy, whilst the slim figure skates on beside him. Sometimes he holds her dainty hand in his, and the scent of her robes is wafted towards him, until he is scarcely capable of self-control; and it does not detract from his happiness to see the scowl with which Crayford regards them. At last Haidee pauses.

"I am getting tired," she says, brightly; "and terribly hungry, unromantic as such a confession sounds. Don't you think it is time we returned to the house?"

Anticipating a solitary walk with her, Black acquiesces, and at once busies himself in untrapping her skates, whilst St. Paul watches with moody eyes the dainty figure in its blue robes and costly furs, and his heart aches with a pang which reminds him of other days, when he had loved and hoped and been deceived.

"She is like the rest of her sex," he thinks, savagely; "an insatiable coquette; and why should I care? Have I not foresworn love and forfeited friendship ages ago?" and then some sudden impulse urges him to her side. "You are going home, Miss Roundfern," he says, languidly, and she flushes a little as she answers,—

"Yes, I am tired, and Mr. Black has kindly offered to return with me, although I am sure he would far rather remain here."

"What a disinterested individual! and I am sure your approval must amply repay him for his sacrifice," he retorts, in such a pointed manner; that the blush upon her face grows positively painful, and the young man beside her feels a wild impulse to strike him down.

Perhaps the girl reads something of this, for she says, quickly, and in a conciliatory tone,—

"If you, too, are tired of the sport, why not walk back with us?"

"Thank you, no; I am scarcely likely to forget the old adage setting forth that two is company, etcetera," and with this last little shaft he turns away. Not too soon, however, to hear Haidee say passionately,—

"I hate him!" and Black's response,—

"I can very well believe that; the fellow is an utter cad!"

Strange that those three words of hers should haunt and sting him; he, who like another Timon, professes to care nothing for the world—its loves and opinions, its pleasures and pains.

He is so lost in melancholy musings that he pays little heed to his steps, scarcely sees the moving figures, the weird landscape; and so, when he comes foul of some rough ice, he is totally unprepared, and falls heavily backwards, one foot under him.

At first there is a hearty laugh raised at his expense; then, as he does not attempt to rise, one or two men skate to him,—

"Are you hurt, Crayford? Why don't you get up, man?"

"I can't; I think something is amiss with my right ankle. Give me a hand one of you fellows," and with some assistance he contrives to lift himself; but his face is white with pain, and his lips set hard, lest he should disgrace his manhood with a groan.

"I'm afraid the mischief is greater than you suppose; you can't get home like this. One of us had best run on to the house," remarks an embryo young surgeon. "Here, Rawdon, you're lightest and swiftest; you be messenger."

It is in vain St. Paul protests he can manage the journey if they will but assist him.

Already young Rawdon has sped on his errand, and very soon succeeds in thoroughly alarming Mrs. Burnand.

The carriage is ordered out, and that lady herself insists on driving to meet her unfortunate favourite.

Haidee, safely ensconced in her room, wonders lazily over this unwonted bustle, and then loses herself in the pages of her new novel. It is a shock to her when, hearing carriage wheels, she rises just in time to see St. Paul lifted out and assisted into the house. If she hates him, as she had stoutly declared, it is strange her heart should beat so fast and heavily, that the lovely colour should leave her cheek, and such a look of dismay darken her beautiful eyes.

She longs to rush downstairs and ask for news of him, but pride and reticence restrain her, and presently she is rewarded by hearing Mrs. Burnand's voice outside the door.

"Haidee, are you there? May I come in?"

The girl opens the door.

"How worried and ill you look!" she says. "What has happened?"

"Oh! the poor boy," breaks out Mrs. Burnand. "It seems he came full tilt upon some very rough ice, and fell so that his right foot was under him. Doctor Blake is with him now, and he says the ankle is dislocated, so he will be a prisoner for weeks. And you, dear Haidee"—this pleadingly—"must help me to amuse him; you have more resources than an old woman like me."

"I shall be pleased to assist you in any and everything," Haidee answers, glad enough that in the fading light Mrs. Burnand cannot see her quivering lips and anxious eyes; "but Mr. Crayford dislikes me, and is almost invariably scolding me."

"Perhaps he is afraid to show his interest in you," Mrs. Burnand says shrewdly. "He does not forget that Gregory holds him in very poor esteem, and would probably forbid you to exchange words with him."

"I think," the girl says, very softly, "that Gregory may have done him injustice, it is so easy for folks to misunderstand each other; so easy for one's actions to be misconstrued."

Mrs. Burnand makes no reply, only stoops and kisses the pretty bowed head, and lays her hands lovingly upon Haidee's shoulders, then she walks to the door, but there she pauses.

"I have given St. Paul the green-room, it is the sunniest; and, Haidee, I should esteem it a kind act, and a favour to myself, if you would look in upon him as you pass."

Half-an-hour later a girlish figure dressed wholly in fine soft-sheeny material of palest pink, pauses on the threshold of the green-room, the cheeks are carmine, the eyes half shy, half tender, as for a moment she looks at St. Paul, sitting in a low chair, his head bent down, his expression so utterly weary, so cruelly despairing, that her heart aches for very pity.

"Mr. Crayford!" she says timidly, advancing, and he starts as he meets her gaze. "Mrs. Burnand wished me to call in as I passed, and inquire if you needed anything?"

"I have all I can desire," he answers coldly, "and I will not detain you. I know how horrible it is to endure the society of one you hate!"

For a little while she stands silent, aghast, downcast; then she says rapidly,—

"Mr. Crayford, did you never tell a lie?" and at her demure tone and expression he laughs outright.

"You see," naively, "you had made me very angry, and indeed it seems your special pleasure is to make me appear ridiculous before others, and I did not stay to choose my words, but I am sorry you overheard them."

"Then I am to understand," with a faint inflection of relief in his weary voice, "that I am not positively repulsive to you?"

"Yes," with an increase of colour. "I don't suppose any two persons ever were more successful in rubbing against one another's corners than you and I. You have taken an almost fiendish delight in snubbing me."

"And you have maliciously delighted in goading me into passion," smiling up at her. "Even your kindest words have carried some sting."

"It seems," Haidee says, laughing, "we are mutually to blame, and if I promise to be very good, you must give me your word as a gentleman to be rude no more," and she holds out a little white hand to him, in token of peace.

Just a moment, whilst the soft fingers seem to cling about his own, a wild hope fills his heart, that this fresh sweet child may not be wholly beyond his reach; that some day she will come to him of her own will, and acknowledge him as her love, her lord. Then with swift remembrance of all the shameful past, with a sickening horror of himself, he almost flings away the white small hand, and averts his eyes.

She stands pained and silent, her breast heaving, her breath coming fast; then he hears the rustling of her skirts, inhales the faint sweet perfume wafted from them, and, looking up, finds her gone.

The next day the guests begin to depart, and soon Mrs. Burnand is alone, save for Haidee and St. Paul, and forgetting all prudence she throws the young people recklessly into each other's society, seeing that St. Paul's salvation lies in the love of some good woman. She has written to Lord Crayford, telling him of his son's accident, and the answer has come speedily, cold and cruel, as the man who had spoiled her life.

"DEAR MADAM,—

"I suppose I should thank you for playing good Samaritan to my scapegrace son, but this I cannot do. On the contrary, I warn you that you are harbouring an ungrateful reprobate, who will repay your kindness with brutal baseness. For your own sake, I should advise you intimate, at once, that his presence in your house is a source of annoyance to you.—Yours very truly,

"SAMUEL CRAYFORD."

To which kindly effusion Mrs. Burnand makes a spirited retort, the nature of which considerably surprises and enrages his lordship.

The days wear by, and although St. Paul rages very bitterly against himself, and fights with all his manhood's strength against the new sweet love that he believes has surely come too late, each day he knows Haidee is dearer to him; that she holds him, as it were,

in the hollow of her hand, to bless or curse him as she will.

And one morning, when she comes to him, he determines to tell her the story of his life, all his wrong and sins; and then he thinks, "she will go her way despising and hating me. Better so, at least I shall have been honest to her!"

"Haidee!" he says, hoarsely, "I am going to put your friendship to a cruel test. I wonder if, when you have heard all, you will 'walk by on the other side,' and leave me to 'dree my weird' as best I may. Did your brother never speak of me?"

"No," she answers, apparently absorbed in arranging her flowers.

"That was because he could say nothing to my credit. Once we were friends!"

"It is not like Gregory to desert those he loves," she answers, gently. "Did you quarrel? Surely there was some misunderstanding which can easily be explained away, unless, indeed, your pride will not let you speak."

"I have small right to be proud," he says, bitterly. "Come and sit close by me, that I may see the change in you as you listen to my shameful story! I am horribly weak this morning, my self-control seems slipping from me. I am,

"Of mine own self

Dethroned, dispraised, diseased; and my mind That was my crown, breaks, and mine heart is gone

And I am naked of my soul, and stand Ashamed."

I find no other words that can so aptly describe my most miserable condition. I wonder if you are brave enough to be my friend, despite all?"

"Try me," Haidee answers, simply. "I think you will not find me fail you."

"And yet I have lost what all men prize—my reputation. And I think even you are not likely to forget that when that is gone—'man are but gilded loam or painted clay!'"

"It is always possible to live down the past, and you are not a weak man. You have courage and strength of purpose, if only you choose to exercise them, and no man is wholly lost who is penitent. I should be glad to hear your story, because telling it may be a help to you, especially if you find that, after hearing it, I am not ashamed to call myself your friend."

"In justice to yourself you shall hear it. By the way, does Gregory know I am a guest here?" and he watches her with intent eyes.

She flashes to her brow, and answers, nervously,—

"I have not told him."

"I am sorry; he must not be kept in ignorance longer. You see, if I were able to move, I would go; as it is, if he objects to our acquaintance, he will come down and carry you off. I can hardly tell you how keenly I should feel such a blow!"

She is sitting close by him now, the firelight flickering on her beautiful hair, on the dainty idle hands loosely clasped together.

St. Paul feasts his eyes on her loveliness, and wonders in his storm-tossed heart if he is dear to her. It would be bliss to know she loved him, if but a little; and deep down in the girl's soul is the cry, "Oh, my dear! oh, my dear! how can I bear to leave you?" and the prayer that it may be given her to make his life a goodly and glad one.

It is he who breaks the silence.

"Listen, and judge me now, Haidee!"

CHAPTER III.

"Of course you know I am Lord Crayford's second and youngest son, and from my earliest years I was his *blé noir*. He is a thoroughly practical man. I was like my mother, dreamy and probably indolent, and he never could tolerate anything but facts. So, when my

mother died, I did not find my home a Paradise, despite the attachment I felt for my brother, and which I was fool enough to believe he reciprocated to the full. My happiest days were those spent at Marlborough, where I remained until nineteen; then my father took me to Cambridge, and I found myself entered at King's College, and awfully proud of the new dignity conferred by cap and gown.

"Young as I was, I had already engaged myself to our rector's daughter, a girl some few months my junior—grave beyond her years, and lovely as a dream. And for her sake I strove to make myself a name. I succeeded in winning my tutor's approval. I believe I was well liked by my companions, and I passed several 'exams' with credit.

"It was at this period that Gregory and I formed a friendship destined to last but a short time, and I suppose I was as happy as health and love could make me. But one morning I received a letter from her—the last I ever had—and it changed the whole current of my life. In it she said she had heard from reliable sources that I was mixed up with a fast set, and was rapidly sinking to their level; consequently, in justice to herself, she must break her engagement to me. Of course I could not understand how such a report was started, and obtaining leave of absence hastened home to plead my cause, and defend myself against my unknown accuser.

"When I arrived at the rectory she would not see me, and in a fury of indignation I went home and burst unceremoniously into my father's presence. I demanded the name of my enemy; he laughed at me, and declared he, too, had heard and believed the report, that he thought Miss Denson had taken the only course open to her. We parted in hot anger, and I went towards the station intending to return at once to Cambridge; and on my way I met my late fiancée. I implored her to tell me who had been her informant. She would not—afterwards I learned she could not—that she and my brother Cecil had fabricated the story for purposes of their own. She said coldly that she had ceased to love me, and as she could no longer esteem me we had best part.

"'To hear is to obey!' I said, stormily; 'I shall not trouble you again.' Well, I went back to Cambridge, but not to the old life. Lectures and chapel knew me no more—or very rarely. All my former friends and associates deserted me, and this served to madden me the more. Then came a curt letter from Lord Crayford, in which he said 'he was utterly disgusted with my mode of life. I was a disgrace to the name I bore, and in future his doors were closed upon me. Your allowance,' he added, 'will be regularly paid you each quarter. I am only sorry that I have no control over that. Your mother's overweening partiality has given you the means to gratify your vicious desires.'

"I was utterly reckless, and flung myself into every kind of dissipation. My rooms were filled from noon to night with the fastest men in the 'Versity. In vain Gregory remonstrated with me, and at last, he too flung me aside.

"I had received many wise and kind warnings from my tutor, but I paid small heed to them—rather was such an utter cad as to act in direct opposition to his known and expressed wishes, and at last the climax came. I went to chapel in a drunken state. The next morning I was called before the fellows and rusticated for two terms.

"I cannot tell you how I spent them, but when I came up to college again all my old associates were gone. New men fought shy of me, and I was as a stranger in the place. I took my degree at last, and had the satisfaction of knowing that with my own hands I had worked my ruin. I stood last on the list—I, who was not without ability, who had been spoken of as one likely to make his mark.

"Months after I met my old fiancée, and felt a fiendish joy that Cecil had not reaped the reward he hoped for. She had married an

elderly, yellow Anglo-Indian of enormous wealth, and she was miserable. I wondered then how I could meet her so calmly, why I should feel some pity for her; it surprised me to find that her faithlessness had killed my love, that in my eyes at least she was no longer beautiful. But her husband did not live long, and a year after his decease she married Cecil, and is now a leader of fashion. Well, let her pass, poor soul! Oh! what an arrant fool I was to wreck my life for such a worthless woman's sake! Haidee! Haidee! what will you say to me now that you know all?"

"That you deserve deepest pity, and that (if so you will) I am your friend now and always," she answers, with gentle firmness.

St. Paul raises her little hands and lays his lips upon them with a tender reverence.

"It is such women as you who make men holy," he says, a little tremulously; and as he speaks the door opens and a tall, muscular man in clerical dress enters. With one quick glance he takes in the whole situation, and his face darkens ominously.

"Haidee!" he says, and his voice is full of pity. "Haidee, little sister!"

She turns with a quick, glad cry of,—

"Gregory, dear old Gregory!" and then her arms are about his neck, her soft cheek laid to his, whilst she questions, "What has brought you here so unexpectedly? And, oh! how delighted I am to see you again! Is this another of Mrs. Burnand's pleasant surprises?"

"No; she was ignorant of my coming; in fact, until I saw Black yesterday I had no idea of leaving Coleston. Crayford, you will excuse me if I desire to see my sister alone. Haidee, run away and dress."

Without a word she obeys; then Roundfern, turning to St. Paul, says, almost piteously,—

"Have you not done enough mischief in your life but you must seek to entrap that innocent child, to win her affection as a pastime? Remember, what is sport to you is death to her!"

"You were always hard upon me," the other answers, with languid coldness; "but because I believe you are genuinely distressed for your sister I will so far satisfy you as this—no word of love has passed between us, and she knows all my wretched story, and pities me."

"You know to what feeling pity is allied?" sadly, "and I am afraid for my sister. I am aware that when you choose to exert yourself you can fascinate all who come under your sway. Your principles forbid me to think—"

"Gregory!"

The voice is Haidee's, and she is standing in the open doorway, a distressed look on her beautiful face.

"You have been quarrelling!" she says, nervously.

"The blame is mine," St. Paul says, in his ordinary tone. "I did my best to provoke your brother, but he rose superior to the assault."

"I know you better than you know yourself," the girl says, gently. "Oh! why will you two not understand each other?"

"Come!" It is Gregory who speaks now, and with an air of protection he draws the girl out into the sunlight; then, "Haidee, what is there between you and Crayford?"

"Nothing but friendship," she answers, with averted eyes. "What should there be besides?" but he notices that she trembles as though with cold, and his great heart aches for this little sister who is so unutterably dear to him.

"I think, my dear," he says, "you hardly realize what friendship with one like Crayford means. He is a man of ruined character, of lax principles—"

"Stop!" she cries, "he is my friend! A woman ruined his hopes, a woman may build them up again; he is homeless, and loveless—"

"Through his own misdeeds."

"Oh, Gregory! are you quite forgetful of the 'charity that thinketh no evil?'"

"My dear! oh, my dear! what can I say to you? Heaven forgive me if I am in the least degree unjust to Crayford; but I cannot forget what he was, nor hold your reputation carelessly."

A look of pride changes the lovely young face.

"You need have no fear for me," with gentle coldness; "and I should be glad to know the reason for your unexpected arrival. Is anything wrong at Coleston? Is Aunt Anna ill?"

"No; but when I heard from Black that Crayford was here I determined to come down at once, and I am sincerely grieved that you should have kept such an item from me; vexed, too, that Mrs. Burnand has thrown you into such doubtful society. When we return, my dear, you will pack up, as I must be in Coleston to-night."

The look of dismay in the wide, lovely eyes pains him more than he cares to show; he lays a gentle hand upon her shoulder.

"Haidee, are you so unwilling to please me? Has home grown so distasteful to you?"

In an access of sudden remorse and self-reproach she turns to him, and remembering all his love and kindness her face softens.

"I will go back with you, Gregory. Your will for once" (smiling sadly) "shall be my law!"

"Thank you," he says, with a simplicity which equals her own. "You shall not regret your decision."

Mrs. Burnand loudly exclaims against her protégée's sudden departure; but Gregory is firm, and not only firm, but very outspoken in his vexation, and candidly tells the poor lady that for the future he shall himself watch over his sister.

"I cannot have her consorting with rascals and blackguards," he says, sternly; and, stung to anger, she retorts,—

"Oh! for the rarity
Of Christian charity
Under the sun!"

Gregory Roundfern, you will yet live to be sorry for this day's work!"

"Say rather I shall be glad," he answers, gravely. "My sister's happiness is dear to me."

"So dear that you ignore all else," Mrs. Burnand retorts, bitterly; "and as you are not infallible, you can hardly know what is best for Haidee."

"It cannot be best for her to live in daily communion with Crayford!" Gregory says, sternly. "I am deeply grieved that I must do violence to your feelings, but I have no alternative."

Then Haidee enters quietly; she is very pale and trembles a little; but her voice is quite steady when she speaks, and in her eyes there is a look Gregory does not understand.

"I am quite ready to go; but, at least, you will not forbid me to leave the house without wishing Mr. Crayford good-bye? He has been very kind to me."

"I do not wish you to be discourteous," Gregory says, relieved to find she has yielded to him with such grace; "and I will wait here for you."

She turns quickly and goes towards the green-room; pushing aside the curtains which screens the doorway she sees St. Paul with his face bowed upon his hands, his whole attitude suggestive of despair. As he hears her light step, and her tremulous, deep breathing, he looks up, and the anguish on his face wrings her heart. In a moment she is beside him, her hand in his strong, close clasp.

"Mr. Crayford, I have come to say good-bye!"

"So he is bent upon taking you away, Haidee, and I have no right to remonstrate with him. I shall miss you very cruelly. Oh, child! oh, child! I think we shall never meet again!"

She trembles violently, and all the lovely light leaves her true young eyes.

"Why should you think so? You have promised to work hard, and to live down the past; and when Gregory sees you are in earnest he will be glad to renew the old friendship!"

St. Paul laughs bitterly. "Not so, Haidee; he will never let you run the risk of meeting me again. You are the only creature who has desired and worked for my good, and if your influence is removed how shall I do well?"

"You will keep your word; first, because you are a man, and strong; and, secondly, because you would not hurt me with the knowledge of your failure. I must go now, but I shall not forget you. I shall hope to hear good things of you—to see you at no very distant date; and now, once more, goodbye!"

As he holds her hand in his, and looks into her face with eager, passionate eyes, her own gaze falters, and he feels her tremble under his touch. The hot tears sting her lids and stain her cheeks. With something like a groan St. Paul presses his lips to the small white fingers. "Heaven bless you!" he says, and so releases her. Without a backward glance she goes out of his presence, and it seems to him the whole world has grown dark since she is not near.

Just outside the room she pauses, and dashes away her tears with a hasty hand. "Oh!" she breathes, "how shall I bear it, how shall I bear it? If only he had said he loved me, all would have been easy."

Mrs. Burnand weeps bitterly over the parting, but Haidee is dry-eyed and calm, so that Gregory congratulates himself no harm has been done, and drives off with his sister in fairly good spirits.

"You are not angry with me, dear?" he asks, almost wistfully.

"No; not angry," she answers quietly, but she does not look at him.

"You see, Haidee, your happiness must be my first thought, and I did not wish your name to be linked with his, as young Black told me it was in danger of being. You cannot touch pitch without being defiled."

"Just so. Consequently, I am sorry I ever knew Mr. Black. He is a sneak!"

CHAPTER IV.

HAIDEE sits in a low chair, and bending over her, with love in his eyes, love on his lips, is the objectionable young Black.

"Your brother has given me permission to speak, Miss Haidee, but what will you say to me; will you tell me to live in hope?" (unconsciously parodying Shakespeare).

"All men, I hope, live so," she quotes a little mockingly. But like many other worthy people, he is somewhat obtuse; and now he tries to possess himself of her hands, but she adroitly avoids his clasp: still, as he is possessed of more than an average amount of conceit, he attributes her action to maidenly reserve, and believes he shall win at a canter."

"Haidee!" he says, not heeding the uplifted brows and disdainful mouth at his familiar mode of address, "Haidee, it is your brother's wish that we should marry; and, indeed, no fellow could love you better than I do. If you were to say no I should be the wretchedest man under the sun. But, my dear, you have told me to hope; and, indeed, I have long done so, and I've the means to make you happy. There are some who will envy my wife, and would gladly change places with her."

"Indeed!" says Haidee, glancing coolly at him, though she chafes under his insolent assurance. "What a pity you cannot satisfy all these envious damsels! For my own part, I should be sorry to rob any woman of such a prize; so pray consider your previous words unsaid."

He looks at her in dismay.

"What have I said to make you angry? Surely you don't want me to underrate myself? That would be a queer way of pleading one's cause."

"It would be far better than trying to advance it by self-praise," coldly, "unless indeed, the humility were affected. I had hoped, Mr. Black that I had made myself sufficiently disagreeable to you for you to guess how impossible it is for me to receive any attention from you. It seems I have failed signally, so to prevent further error, let me say, under no circumstances would I marry you!"

She almost laughs at the comical astonishment and dismay on his face.

"You don't mean that you are going to throw me over altogether?" he asks.

"I cannot blame myself in this matter; I have never given you any encouragement," Haidee answers quietly.

"Indeed you have—or at least you did, before that fellow Crayford made himself so agreeable to you."

"You are talking like a bargee," the girl retorts; "but since you have dragged Mr. Crayford's name into the discussion let me say that your conduct towards him was so thoroughly contemptible that I ceased to regard him in the light of a gentleman. Why should you give yourself such an immensity of trouble merely to blacken him to my brother?"

"I only spoke the truth. I did not wish him to play fast-and-loose with you."

"Thank you for your kindly consideration, but believe me I am quite capable of protecting myself, and not afraid to defend the absent!"

"I believe you are in love with the fellow," Black says, in his rage forgetting all the proprieties, and permitting his innate vulgarity to appear through the thin veneer of refinement he usually wears.

As soon as he has uttered the words he regrets them, for there comes such resentment into Haidee's eyes, such an outraged look upon her face, that he knows he has ruined himself irretrievably with her.

"You can leave the house," she says, icily, "and I shall acquaint Mr. Roundfern with this morning's occurrence. We do not receive roughs at the Rectory."

So he goes out ashamed and discomfited, leaving Haidee mistress of the field.

"Oh!" she says in her heart, "was my love for him so palpable that every fool who ran might read? My darling! oh, my darling! shall I never see you, or hear of you again?"

She is very changed since the day she parted from St. Paul Crayford. Not less lovely, neither thinner nor paler; only deep in the dark eyes lies a shadow which never lifts, and she is so quiet in ways and speech that often Gregory and Aunt Anna regard her with something very like anxiety, and the latter will say,—

"Are you not well, Haidee? It is so rarely you sing or laugh as you used to do."

"I am growing older and graver," with a faint smile that is very pathetic, and Gregory, seeing it, wonders if he has done well; and if, after all, he has spared his little sister pain by his abrupt appearance at Mrs. Burnand's.

"She used to be so gay," he thinks sadly. "Hardly ever did I see her with a shadow on her face. Poor child, poor little Haidee!" but he dares not question her, lest he shall learn what least he wishes to know—that she has given her fresh young heart to St. Paul Crayford.

He is greatly relieved to find no message from him reaches her, and hopes that soon he will fade out of Haidee's mind, as he has faded from her life.

One day she looks up, flushed and smiling, from reading one of Mrs. Burnand's letters.

"Gregory," she says, "you will be pleased to hear the best of news of our mutual friend, Mr. Crayford." His heart dies within him.

"He is living very quietly in town, waiting for an appointment which Mrs. Burnand says he is almost sure to get. Some influential

friends of the family have at last stirred themselves in his behalf."

"I hope he will be successful," but the tone is coldly gentle and hurt, and angry. Haidee returns to her letter, but does not impart any other item of news to her brother or aunt.

It is now early April, and her heart has often been heavy with fear, sick with hope so long deferred. Why does he neither write nor come? Why can she have the love she loathes, and be bereft of the love for which she prays with all her soul? Only yesterday she listened to Black's odious proposal. Was it well so to despise and reject him? Should not one be grateful even for his devotion?"

Aunt Anna and Gregory are out on their errands of mercy, and she has the garden to herself. It is a warm, soft day; and Haidee, half-mechanically, has filled her hands with golden daffodils, and heavy-scented hyacinths. She is very sad this morning, full of anxious thought for St. Paul, of fears lest he will leave England without one word or sign to comfort her poor heart; "and oh!" she thinks, "surely it is not much to ask—a word or line of farewell, seeing I have given him all my life!"

"Haidee!"

The hot blood flows to her cheeks; her heart beats so madly that she can scarcely speak; for there, standing before her, is he who in her inmost soul she has accused of forgetfulness.

How gaunt and worn he is. What heavy shadows are under his eyes. Truly these last three months have not been easy for him. She drops her flowers and stretches out eager hands to meet his.

"You have come back?" she says, in a breathless way. "I began to fear you would not."

"I could stay away no longer," he answers, in a strange, hoarse voice. "I felt I must see you before I left England, perhaps for ever! I sail for India in three weeks."

"India?" in a low tone, and the blank despair on her face is a cruel temptation to him.

"Yes! I have been lucky enough to secure the berth Mrs. Burnand wrote you of, and for your sake I mean to live a different life. I have tried hard these three months to do as you would have me, but it has been uphill work, with no one to encourage me by word or look. In another country things will be easier for me; and, Haidee, may I hope you will not quite forget me? I have so few friends that I cannot afford to lose one!"

"I shall not forget you," she wonders if it is her own voice she hears, it sounds so faint and far away. Oh! must he go? Will not all her love and longing avail to keep him near her?

"Is there no chance of return for you?" she asks, in that dull way which so tortures him. "May I—may we not hope to see you any more?"

"Why should I return? My life here is over and done with; the country of my adoption will be my country until my death, unless—"

"Unless?" she questions, as he pauses suddenly, fighting fiercely with the temptation assailing him; and as he looks on her sweet loveliness, and knows it may be his for the asking, his strength fails him, and he gives up the unequal conflict.

"Unless you will let me hope I may one day call you wife. Oh, Haidee! oh! my darling! I am a worthless fellow at best; an alien from my family; almost an outcast from society, with nothing to offer you but what I may earn by real and hard labour; but I love you! I love you with all my soul! What will you say to me, dear?"

Her sweet eyes shine through their tears, her face is changed, and made radiant by satisfied love.

"St. Paul," she says, "I am all yours. You will never be sick with hope deferred—"

But he stays any further speech by catching her close to him, and raining wild kisses on the dainty mouth—the fresh, pure face of this

girl—who is willing to leave all for his sake—country and friends—to make his home hers, to follow him through weal and woe, to the very brink of the grave.

"Heaven grant," he says, solemnly, "you may never regret this day!"

She smiles up at him.

"How should I, when it has given me you? Oh! we will be very happy!" Then in a sudden access of fear, "Will you love and esteem me less because I was so easily won?"

"Sweetheart, no! I shall thank Heaven all my life for this great gift; but oh! Haidee, how shall I bear to leave you behind, and for an indefinite time?"

Her eyes open wide and frightened upon his face.

"Oh! do not leave me!" she says, in all simplicity. "Take me with you!"

"What would Gregory say to such an arrangement? Indeed, I think our engagement will vex him considerably; he had other hopes for you."

"When he sees that it is *you* only who can make me happy he will be content."

But St. Paul looks doubtful; nor are his fears allayed when Gregory suddenly enters the garden and confronts him. The clergyman wears an anxious and vexed expression, and his greeting is not remarkable for warmth.

"This is, indeed, a surprise! May I ask if my sister knew of your coming?"

"She did not; but I felt I could not leave England without seeing her. I sail in three weeks' time for Calcutta. I have obtained a very good appointment under Government there!"

Gregory sighs relievedly.

"I wish you every success, Crayford; won't you come in? It is inhospitable to keep you out here," and he glances at Haidee as though he wishes her to leave them.

But for once she is dense, and stands her ground, afraid that in her absence high words may ensue between the two she loves best on earth. St. Paul comes to the rescue.

"I want to see you alone for a few moments, Roundfern."

"Come, we shall be undisturbed in the study," and he leads the way to the house, Haidee contriving on the way to whisper, "Be kind to him, for my sake!" and with a great fear in his heart, Gregory signs St. Paul to follow him to his own sanctum.

Then he confronts him, looking harassed and distressed.

"Is your errand here in anyway connected with my sister?" he asks, abruptly.

"It is! I came to say good-bye; but when with her I forgot my good resolutions, and told her what she is to me. She has accepted me; and now it only remains for you to consent to our marriage!"

He speaks defiantly, anticipating bitter and implacable opposition from Gregory, and resolved, whatever comes, never to give up his claim to Haidee, save at her own entreaty.

"I was afraid of this," Gregory says, grievously, and passes one hand wearily across his brow. "She has known so few men intimately, and you fascinate women more by your cynicism than others do by flattery; even your reputation assists you. Crayford, she is all I have; leave her to me. Surely some other woman, more versed in the ways of the world, will serve your turn better than this innocent girl?"

"I love her!" doggedly, "and she has given herself to me!"

"Not knowing what she did, was it well to take advantage of her innocence?" sternly. "If you had been honourable you would have won her openly!"

"What chance had I? I tell you, Roundfern, I resolved never to see her again, because I felt my own unworthiness so keenly. I went to London and busied myself in obtaining some employment. I had no hope of winning her then, I only longed to live worthily—to atone, if I could, for the past. Day after day, week after week, the yearning to see her again

grew and grew, until it became positive agony. She was not for me; she had probably already forgotten me. So I reasoned; but I had small faith in my own reasoning. Then news came that I had received this appointment for which I dared scarcely hope, and I was ordered to prepare at once for the voyage. I put it to you thus, Roundfern:—Could you (had you been so placed) leave England for years, perhaps for ever, without a word or sign to the woman you loved?"

He pauses, as if waiting for a reply, but as none comes he goes on a trifle impatiently,—

"I kept nothing back from Miss Roundfern. I laid my life bare to her; but she is not afraid to trust or take me. Give her to me, and I swear no act of mine shall bring her to grief!"

"How can I believe you? Your repentance is so new, this so-called love of yours so fresh and untried. How shall I know that it will stand the test of years? Forgive me! Haidee is a legacy to me from my dear mother, and has been my care and my delight for many years. Any sorrow that might come to her would be mine, and added to this I should reproach myself that I had not been sufficiently careful for her."

"You are very charitable in your estimate of me. 'It is a long lane that has no turning,' remember, and when a man has sown his wild oats he may reasonably be expected to settle down to respectability."

"But the woman who takes him runs a great risk," Gregory says, coldly.

"Not so," flippantly; "reformed rakes make the best of husbands, the most moral citizens the most priggish members of society. Now, Roundfern, let us waste no more words in controversy. Will you or will you not consent to this engagement?"

"I don't know what to say," Gregory answers, distressfully. "I want to secure Haidee's happiness, and I do not wish to appear unnecessarily harsh to you. See, Crayford! I will make this condition with you. If after a year you have proved the change in you is permanent, and both you and Haidee are loyal each to the other, I will consent to the engagement."

"And how are you to know what my line of life is," scornfully—"you in England, I at Calcutta? Your motive is very palpable. You fancy that when I am well away it will be an easy matter to teach Haidee forgetfulness of me. Ugh! You are not a born diplomat. When I go I take my wife with me. I will run no risk."

"What! Do you suppose I shall allow such a thing? A three weeks' engagement, then a marriage, to be repented of almost as soon as cemented! No, Crayford! if you will not agree to my conditions the matter ends at once. During the year of probation you will not correspond. If your love will stand the test of absence and silence I shall have some faith in its genuineness."

"Will you not understand that I need encouragement, that I am as a brand not yet plucked from burning? Show me a little mercy!"

"I cannot forget to be just where Haidee is concerned, and I will not go from my word. Pray consider the interview closed. If you agree to my terms well and good—at the end of the year you can claim Haidee."

"And you would send her out to me like a bale of goods!" bitterly. "Well, this hour is yours, but mine will come. You will scarcely expect me to leave without seeing Haidee?"

"You will find her in the next room. Aren't we to part friends, Crayford?"

"I have not yet added hypocrisy to my many virtues," and he turns on his heel.

He finds Haidee waiting for him, flushed and anxious, and one glance at his face tells her all the truth.

In a moment her arms are about him, her eyes yearning upon him through her tears.

"My dear, my dear! don't take it so much to heart; Gregory will relent if only we are loyal and patient!"

"Patient!" he echoes, scornfully. "Patience is for fools! What motive do you think your brother has in making his conditions? Why this—to effect our final separation. Haidee, my darling, will you be content to obey him, to let me go, when we have but just tasted the depth of our mutual love? Who is to be first with you—Gregory or me?"

"How can you ask? Oh, my dear! my heart is torn with love for you both! Can I forget all the kindness lavished on me by Gregory, all the years in which he has been father and brother too? What shall I do? Help me in my decision; you are wiser than I."

"If I decide for you, you will think me selfish, will probably refuse to act according to my wishes," moodily. "No, Haidee, you must choose for yourself. Either you sail with me, or take your freedom now. If you feel you cannot act in opposition to Roundfern, tell me now, that there may be no misunderstanding in the future."

"Oh! this is cruel!" the girl cries in an anguish of perplexity and pain. "I love you both so well, it is hard to displease either. And St. Paul, if I say that wherever you go I will follow, under no circumstances would Gregory consent to such a hasty marriage."

"He could be kept in ignorance until the ceremony was complete. Ah! sweetest, think of all you are to me—of how, but for you I stand all alone in the world, that I have given you all I have to give, and look to you for my happiness."

"Don't!" she says, in a hushed tone; "my heart is failing me. Oh! my dear, oh! my dear! in your hands I am weak as a little child!"

He is kneeling by her now, his arms about her waist, his eloquent, pleading eyes lifted to hers, and he feels her tremble under his touch, his caress, and knows that already the battle is almost won.

"I will do nothing in haste," she says, distressfully. "Give me time for thought," and suddenly she bursts into bitter tears.

He is very gentle and patient with her, and soon she recovers a semblance of her ordinary manner.

"To-morrow," she says, "I will give you my answer."

"To-morrow I shall be refused admission to the house!"

"I will meet you in Fairy Hollow," she answers, flushing at her own suggestion. "I will not fail you, St. Paul—now go. Remember, to-morrow at three. Gregory will be from home then. Oh, Heaven! forgive me for deceiving the kindest brother a girl ever had!"

She is so broken with pain and passion that he sees it is wisest to leave her. He takes her very close to his heart, praying her to be true to him, to remember her promise; then he goes out, and she watches him striding through the garden, while in her heart is the dumb cry, "My darling! my darling! how can I give you up?"

CHAPTER V.

TO-NIGHT Gregory is very tender and pitiful towards Haidee, but she cannot meet his eyes, knowing what act she is meditating. Her heart is very heavy, and but for the thought of her lover she would throw herself on his breast and pray his pardon, confess freely and fully, and so be at peace.

"You must feel, my darling!" he says gravely, "that I am acting as I believe for the best, that I am not willingly cruel to you. Haidee! Haidee! why must you love this man? What is there in him to win your innocent heart?"

"How can I tell!" she answers, with a little sob. "I pitied him first, he was so lonely; and now—and now—oh! Gregory, it will be cruel as death to lose him!"

The grave, sad face grows graver and sadder.

"Do my conditions seem so hard, little

sister? Am I asking too much in return, for my lifelong love for you?"

"No! no! no!" with bitter tears. "I am ungrateful and wicked, unworthy all your care—all your goodness. Oh, my brother! why should any difference rise between us? Why will you not see him with my eyes?"

Very gently he brushes back the wandering hair from the young, pure brow, and there is infinite pity in his fixed regard of her.

"Perhaps one day, my dear, you will realise I acted for the best."

Haidee scarcely seems to hear. She lies very quietly in his arms for awhile; then suddenly, and without looking up, she says,—

"Gregory, whatever I may do in the future, whatever pain I bring you, remember that, in spite of all that seems so contrary, I loved you—that I shall love you till I die!"

"I could not doubt that," he answers, blissfully ignorant of her hidden meaning. "We have always been dear to each other."

"Perhaps," she says, brokenly, "I shall often grieve and vex you, perhaps I shall seem forgetful of your years of devotion, but you must trust me always. Your anger would be very hard to bear."

"I think I could not be angry with you," gently, and kissing her he lets her go.

How terribly long the night is to Haidee. It is impossible to sleep, and equally vain to attempt to read. She paces the slow, dark hours in tossing to and fro, questioning of her heart what she shall do, crying alternately on St. Paul and Gregory.

Towards dawn she falls into an uneasy sleep, from which she is roused by the clang of the breakfast-bell.

Both her aunt and brother regard her with anxiety; her face is pale and weary, her eyes heavy, her whole manner so listless that Gregory reproaches himself with past harshness, and Miss Roundfern begs her to lie down again.

"I think I will," rising, and always avoiding her brother's gaze. "I feel stupid and languid," and glad to escape, she goes back to her room, to spend the sunny morning in solitude.

Soon after luncheon (at which she does not appear) her aunt enters her room.

"My dear, I shall drive with Gregory to the institute, unless, indeed, you prefer I should remain with you. He is quite disappointed you cannot go, for we expect a crowded meeting."

"Pray do not miss it, dear auntie, I would rather be alone," and she flushes guiltily. "Perhaps I shall go to sleep."

For a moment Miss Roundfern regards her with suspicion.

"Why is your manner so strange, Haidee?" and receiving no answer, "Is Mr. Crayford still in the village?"

"I believe so, auntie; he is waiting in the hope that Gregory will alter his decision."

"Poor little girl!" says the elder lady. "I will do what I can for you, but I am afraid words are useless," and the kind, foolish soul goes away in a depressed mood, to discover all her pleadings with Gregory serve but to intensify his resolve.

Just before three Haidee rises, and, dressing herself with more than ordinary care, starts for the appointed trysting-place. She is very nervous, and frequently glances behind to see that she is not followed, and she fancies all who meet her must know upon what errand she is bent, and condemn her for her duplicity.

St. Paul is waiting for her at the entrance of the little valley known as "Fairy Hollow," and taking her trembling hands in his, drawing her towards him, says,—

"I don't know how to thank you for this concession; it is so much more than I deserve. I hated having to ask you to meet me here, and clandestinely. But with Gregory against us what can we do?"

"Oh!" she says, "I would do much more for you, but it is cruel to deceive Gregory. All night I could not sleep for my shame and

pain; all night I tried to see where my duty lay; and oh! my dear, my dear! my heart pleaded for you, cried out upon me to comfort you, and stand by you."

"And so, Haidee," eagerly, "you have arrived at some decision."

"Yes. You need me most. I will go with you," and then she begins to tremble with pain and fear; but he catches her in his arms and kisses her wildly, tells her again and again of his love, and wins her back to something like calmness.

"Tell me," she whispers, drawing a little out of his strong, encircling arms. "Will you always hold me as dear as now, when the charm of novelty has worn away, and you find I am neither better nor cleverer than other women?"

"Each day will knit us closer together, and the memory of the debt I owe you will serve but to deepen my devotion. Can't you trust me, Haidee?"

"If I did not do so, fully and perfectly, I should not be here now. But I cannot stay long, so tell me your plans quickly; we shall have no other chance of speech."

"I arranged everything last night. You are fortunately just of age, so that there will be neither perjury nor illegality in our marriage. To-night I shall go to town, and proceed at once to Mrs. Burnand's."

"Is she to be in the conspiracy?" questions Haidee, a trifle nervously.

"My darling, yes. It is for your sake I shall ask her to share the secret. I shall prevail on her to bring my bride to me, so that no scandal shall stain her name. I shall get a license, and have all things arranged for our departure from England. To-day is the thirteenth. Very well; on the twenty-seventh you will walk to the station and meet the 9.30 train to London. Mrs. Burnand will be in a first, and you will travel up with her. At King's-cross I shall meet you and take you to the quiet little church I have already selected for the ceremony, and as soon as it is complete we will telegraph to Gregory, informing him of the step we have taken. We shall follow our message to ask (and I hope obtain) forgiveness; then we will spend seven whole delicious days together before we leave for Calcutta. Does the programme suit you, little woman?"

She stirs uneasily in his arms.

"I hate myself for the part I am playing; but there is no other way open to us, and I cannot let you go alone. But St. Paul, if Gregory will neither forgive nor see us."

"Then you must be content with my love, sweetheart, and in time he will be reconciled to our union. I think he cares too much for you to be obdurate."

She is silent a little while, then says, with a faint smile,—

"You have forgotten to be cynical."

"Yes, since I was certain of your love. I pose no longer as the disappointed *roué*. Oh! my darling, my darling! Heaven grant I may make you happy."

"You will do that," gently; "and now, dear, let me go," and she disengages herself from him. He is very reluctant to release her, but she is so pale and weary-looking that he does violence to his own feelings.

"Good-bye, good-bye, my darling wife! It will be an eternity till the twenty-seventh."

He watches her with anxious eyes as she goes homeward with drooped head and swift, uncertain steps; then he turns towards the inn, and packing his portmanteau is driven to the primitive station just in time to catch the five o'clock train to town.

Those next fourteen days are terrible to Haidee; she cannot meet her brother's eyes, lest haply he should read her secret in her look. Every kind word he speaks stabs her to the heart with a keener sense of her deception; every thoughtful, tender act or touch serves only to increase her mental anguish, her mental turmoil. A thousand times a confession trembles on her lips, and many times, in the long bright days, the cool, quiet evenings, when they sat together, she is on the

point of throwing herself upon his breast, there to sob out all the truth; but the thought of St. Paul restrains her. She grows so pale and wan that her aunt and Gregory are anxious for her, and the former says,—

"Dear boy, our child will break her heart over her lover. Is it quite impossible for you to consent to their wishes?"

"Quite," he answers, almost sternly, "and in a little while, aunt, she will forget, and be her old self again."

Miss Roundfern sighs, for she has had a larger experience in such matters than her nephew, and she knows it is not so easy to forget the loved and the lost, and is more troubled about Haidee than she cares to own. She lingers about her with little loving observances, is tender and pitiful in ways and speech—remembering how she, too, long ago, had suffered like agony, only her lover had forgotten her so easily, consoled himself so readily for her loss.

The days and hours fleet by with lightning rapidity to the poor girl; each one brings her nearer her lover, nearer that irremediable step and what wonder if her heart often fails her, and her courage faints!

The morning of the twenty-seventh comes all too soon; bright and clear, but with an easterly wind which tosses the golden daffodils to and fro, and plays cruel pranks with all the early blossoms.

Breakfast is long since over at the Rectory, and Haidee has gone to her room to dress. What bitter tears she shed throughout the simple toilet, what heart-felt prayers she offers up for guidance, and that comfort may not be denied Gregory! At last the final touch is given to her dress, the last refractory ribbon adjusted, and without a glance in the mirror at her pale, sweet face, she goes slowly downstairs.

Perhaps she never will enter these dear, familiar rooms again, her voice may never sound through the ancient hall. She, the pride and darling of her brother's heart, may be thrust from out his home (should she so far presume as to seek an entrance), branded for all time as an alien from her family.

In the breakfast-room she can hear Aunt Anna, issuing orders to the cook; the canary in the window is singing his loudest, whilst from the study come soft peals of music. (Gregory is seated at his organ.) When shall she see his rapt, earnest face again?

The cook comes out into the hall, and glances curiously at the silent figure, the white, face.

"Are you ill, Miss Haidee?" she asks solicitously, and with a start the girl answers hurriedly,—

"No, no, only a little faint," and goes into her aunt.

"Dear!" she says, and she can scarcely hear her own voice, it sounds so far away.

"I am going out, my head aches badly, and a brisk walk will do me good."

"It is very cold," the elder lady says, shrugging her shoulders. "Are you well wrapped up? Good gracious, Haidee! what is the matter with you? You are only fit to lie down, it is madness to think of going out."

"I am very well, auntie," forcing her white lips to speak firmly. "You are alarming yourself unnecessarily."

"Well, if you will go, let me accompany you," with a regretful glance at the bright fire and large easy chair she has just vacated.

"Indeed! no auntie. You must not indulge all my whims, or sacrifice yourself to my pleasures, and I know you are anxious to finish that collar."

Miss Roundfern reseats herself with a relieved air.

"And which way do you intend walking? Perhaps I may be inclined to meet you."

"Towards the station," flushing hotly. "The walk there is the most sheltered, I fancy."

"Good-bye dear," and stooping, she kisses her, much to Miss Roundfern's surprise, for Haidee is not usually demonstrative.

Then she leaves the house, not daring to

say one word of farewell to Gregory lest he should guess her errand, and forcibly detain her. The tears blind her lovely eyes, as they rest upon each familiar tree and shrub, on all the budding beauties of the dear old garden. And when the gate closes behind her, and she feels herself shut out by her own act from her Paradise, she stretches out eager, longing hands, and whispers brokenly, "Oh! home! home! home!" and wonders if ever she will return a welcome guest.

But she has little time to lose, and hurries along the desolate road. The hedgerows are beginning to bud, and the air is filled with the fragrance of wild violets. Ah! in the land to which she is going, how she will miss all the sweet, homely scents and sights! High over her head the larks are carolling, in the trees and bushes the saucy sparrows are quarrelling and flitting with unctious, and a few white butterflies are flitting before her. Everything serves to sadden her.

Now she is at the primitive little station, and has but just taken her ticket when the train dashes up; the porter, who knows her well, touches his cap.

"Going by this train, miss?" he asks obsequiously.

"Yes; but I must find a friend first," and as she speaks, Mrs. Burnand thrusts her head out of a carriage window, and calls her by her name.

"Jump in, Haidee! We haven't a moment to lose. What a good girl you are to come; and see we have the compartment to ourselves! A judicious 'tip' to the guard won this commission from him."

Haidee listens, but does not answer, and it is a very cold hand indeed which lies in Mrs. Burnand's clasp. Now they are off, and she strains her eyes to catch the last glimpse of the Rectory chimneys, and her companion feels her tremble against her.

"Cheer up, Haidee, love! all will be well yet. Why, child, what a sorry bride St. Paul will have. You are as white as the first snow-drops! Surely you are not afraid to trust the man you love?"

"No, no! but I cannot forget how grieved Gregory will be!"

"My dear! you could not please both brother and lover, and the latter has the greatest claim upon you. Once having given yourself to him it is your duty to cling to him, to stand by him to the last, and despite all. As for me, I am doubtless a silly old woman to assist in an elopement, but I believe I am acting for St. Paul's good and your future happiness."

"You have always been most kind!" the girl says, very gently.

"Gregory will scarcely endorse that sentiment," drily. "I shall be considerably alarmed at the mere idea of meeting him again. I fancy his wrath will fall heaviest on my head."

"It is I who am most to blame," sadly, "I who have behaved badly."

But Mrs. Burnand will not allow her to dwell upon this side of the subject; and by the time they reach King's-cross she has somewhat restored the girl to calmness.

St. Paul, flushed and handsome, is waiting for them, and for a moment, as her hand trembles in his, Haidee thinks the light of love on his face is worth all her sacrifice and pain, and is almost content. He has a cab in waiting, and they drive at once to a little, dingy, unfrequented church, so packed away amongst tall, gaunt houses as to be nearly overlooked by a casual passer-by.

"This is the place, Haidee!" the young man whispers. "Courage, my darling! The trial will soon be over, and you will be my very own!"

CHAPTER VI.

"It is a very different wedding to any Haidee has ever pictured; there is no pretty finery, no fluttering bridesmaid; the clergyman is old, and does not feel interested in the young

couple before him; rather, he is a trifle vexed that they should have taken him away from his beloved books; and the only witnesses are Mrs. Burnand and the clerk.

Haidee plays her part like one in a dream, and in a half-conscious way afterwards signs her maiden name for the last time. Then St. Paul kisses her and leads her away, and they are driven to the hotel he is in the habit of frequenting, and where he has had a sumptuous lunch prepared.

Haidee is far too agitated to eat or talk much, only she begs the jubilant bridegroom to telegraph at once to her brother.

"They will be growing anxious about me," she says, distressfully, "and I must not add neglect to my other faults."

So the telegram is despatched, but, as chance will have it, neither Miss Roundfern nor Gregory are at home. The former has been carried off for the remainder of the day by an old school friend, and Gregory is engaged in Brabourne for several hours, arranging all the details of a coming charity fair. So Haidee's absence is neither noticed nor commented upon.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Burnand returns to her town house, there to wait news from her protégées; and St. Paul carries his bride off to see the wonders and glories of the metropolis. He sends, too, a telegram acquainting his father with his hasty marriage, with the malicious addition that there are no settlements.

"How riled he will be!" the young man says, laughing. "I would give twenty pounds (providing I could spare them) to see his disgust. He will say 'the fellow was always a fool, I am glad I am rid of him!'"

"And Cecil's wife?" questions Haidee, a trifle mischievously, "what will she say?"

"Probably that I am imprudent; most certainly she will agree perfectly with my lord, and she will wonder in a mild way over the bride's appearance and dress. Haidee! Haidee! my little darling, how shall I thank you for your trust? You have given me new hope, new aims, and, please Heaven, I will prove myself not all unworthy of you."

In her heart there is no longer any doubt of him; she is his now until death—his not only by love, but by the solemnest of vows; and it shall be her pride, her joy, to cling to him, to throne him in her heart as her dear lord and master.

Evening comes, and Gregory calls on his way from Brabourne for Miss Roundfern. They are very quiet throughout the drive, he busy with thoughts of his work, she brooding over Haidee and her "unfortunate love affair." But as they are nearing the Rectory, she says,—

"The poor child will have had a dull day. I did not wish to leave home, but Mrs. Thurston would take no denial, and I did not know how long Haidee would be absent, or I would have waited and taken her with me. Don't you think she is looking terribly ill?"

"Yes, and I've been thinking, aunt, you would do well to take her away for a few weeks; a change will be good for you both. Select some nice seaside place (not too quiet), and start as soon as possible. The child must not break her heart, or ruin her health, for the sake of a profligate."

"I think, Gregory, you are too hard upon Mr. Crayford; I thought him a very nice, pleasant young fellow."

"I know his past," Gregory answers, sternly, "and consequently am the best judge of what is good for Haidee," and as he speaks, he begins to assist her from the chaise.

He is a little surprised that there are no lights in the drawing-room, and asks of the maid who admits them,—

"Has Miss Haidee gone to her room?" and glances at the darkened windows.

"Miss Haidee has not been in since morning, sir. We thought perhaps you had met her and taken her on with you to Brabourne."

A great dread seizes him, but he stops his

aunt's exclamations by a gesture, and draws her into the house.

"If you please, sir," adds the maid, "there's a telegram for you on the study table; it came hours ago."

Together aunt and nephew enter the study, she clinging to him in a state of vague, undefined fear, wondering if the "poor child can have done anything desperate," remembering how *distract* Haidee had recently been.

Gregory rings for a light, whilst Miss Roundfern clings to him.

"Oh! Greg, what can it mean? What are you going to do?"

He stands silent, as if, indeed, he is beyond speech; and when candles are brought in he turns to the table, and taking up the telegram, breaks open the orange envelope with a strange expression on his face. From the first moment he has felt it will give him the explanation of Haidee's absence. The few words seem to dance before his eyes, and with a groan he gives the paper to Miss Roundfern, saying,—

"Read it. I am afraid."

"We were married this morning; shall be with you to-night."

Gregory sinks into a chair, and covering his eyes gives vent to a low and bitter groan.

"Haidee! Haidee!" he says, and his companion falls on her knees beside him, praying him with tears not to take the news so hardly, not to break down utterly, that things may not be so bad as they seem.

He scarcely hears, and certainly does not heed her; he only knows that all his love and all his care have failed to save his sister from the fate he so dreaded for her.

"Great Heaven!" he says, "she has rushed blindly and obstinately to her own destruction, and from to-day her life is in his hands. Oh! it is cruel!"

"Gregory, my dear Gregory! You frighten me," Miss Roundfern murmurs, and then he realises her presence.

"Poor Aunt Anna, we have been badly served; but remember, she is to be welcomed with love, so that, when evil days come, she may feel quite sure that this is her home so long as I live."

"Why will you persist in anticipating sorrow?" the Aunt asks, impatiently.

She is rapidly rallying from her depression, and being a foolish as well as a kindly woman, begins to regard Haidee's marriage from a romantic point of view.

"It will never do for them to find us unprepared, and they may be with us almost any moment. You will excuse me, Gregory, I am sure," and she bustles away to superintend the preparation of a dainty meal. She is in a pleasant state of excitement, and astonishes the maids by informing them that Miss Haidee and her bridegroom are coming," and laughs prettily at their astonished looks.

"I thought we should surprise you," she says, with what she thinks fine cunning. "Miss Haidee wanted the wedding to be very quiet, and we kept the secret well."

And whilst she chats on excitedly the master of the house sits alone, his face bowed on his arms, given up wholly to bitter grief. That Haidee should so deceive him seems almost incredible; that she should be the subject of ill-natured gossip is pain and shame to him; but worse than all is the thought that she has voluntarily given herself up to a life of misery.

There is blind rage in his heart, rage and hate against the man who has stolen her away, and he groans at the remembrance of how impotent he has been to save her from herself.

How shall he greet her? What excuses, what pleadings will she offer?

"Haidee, Haidee!" he said aloud; and as if in answer to his call there comes the rustling of a woman's skirt, a soft, swift step he knows well, and looking up he sees his sister standing in the open doorway, and behind her, changed in look and manner—St. Paul Crayford!

The rebuke he has meant to speak dies on Gregory's lips as he meets those shining eyes,

so happy, despite their tears, as he sees the little imploring gesture of the outstretched hands—he has no anger for her.

"Little sister, come here!" and then her arms are about his neck, her cheek wet with tears pressed to his, and her sweet voice is faltering "forgive me, dear."

Speechless and trembling he holds her close. She is his no longer, he must be content to take the second place in her heart; it is hard after such devotion as his, but it is natural. Presently he puts her away, and addressing St. Paul says, with bitter pain and anger,—

"What have you done? Was there no other way to win her but by theft?"

"You left no other course open to me. The year of probation you proposed would have completed my moral and social ruin. I don't wish to excuse my conduct—I suppose there is no reasonable excuse for it—but I swear before Heaven that no act of mine shall give your sister one hour's grief," and he possesses himself of his pale bride's hand. "Speak for me, Haidee!" he says.

She lifts her eyes to Gregory's stern face. "You have forgiven me, forgive him too. Remember every blow you strike at him crushes me too; every unkind word or sneer hurled upon him punishes me twofold; that I am wounded through him. For my sake, let peace be between you."

Just a moment's hesitation, then Gregory stretches out his hand.

"For her sake," he says, and St. Paul as he echoes the words, lays his hand in the strong palm, and promises that no harm that he can avert, shall fall upon his bride's fair head.

How it comes about Gregory cannot afterwards tell, but soon they are all seated round the table, talking and smiling, Aunt Anna in the happiest state of excitement possible; and St. Paul is rapidly ingratiating himself with her by his genial way, and his evident devotion to his bride.

"You will stay with us until you set sail?" Gregory says, after a lull in the conversation.

"No, we go to Southampton to-morrow if Haidee can get her packing over so soon; but, of course, you will come down and see us off?"

CHAPTER VII.

It is the last day but one of the Crayfords' stay in Southampton, and they are momentarily expecting Gregory's arrival. Haidee has recovered her lost bloom, and is a most charming bride, the pleasantest companion a man can desire.

Just now she is engaged in addressing labels for their luggage, looking up now and again to make some saucy remark to St. Paul, who is watching her with a fond air of proprietorship.

"What a lazy boy you are!" she says, with a shake of her pretty head. "I declare you have done nothing to assist me all day!"

"My dear, I'm saving my strength for future needs," coolly. "You inform me you are a good sailor. I am the reverse. Think what pangs I shall endure on the voyage out! Then when we are once at Calcutta I shall be at work early and late."

Haidee coughs sceptically, then,—

"Would it hurt you very much to direct a few of these?" pointing to the packet of labels.

"It wouldn't hurt me, but it would be the means of exasperating a good many worthy folks. My writing is so dreadfully bad that it not only puzzles others, but I can't decipher it myself. I am proud to say each individual letter is a hieroglyph."

"A gentleman and lady to see you, sir," announces a stolid waiter suddenly.

"Oh, St. Paul! Gregory has brought aunt with him! How delightful!"

"Show them up," says Crayford.

And Haidee, sweeping the labels aside, rises to greet the new-comers but she is consider-

ably surprised to find they are utter strangers to her.

Her husband takes her hand, and draws it in his arm, then faces the visitors with frowning brow and flashing eyes.

The lady speaks first.

"We have come to offer our congratulations, St. Paul, and had some difficulty in finding you!"

"I am sorry you should have troubled yourself so far. Haidee, allow me to introduce you to my father and Mrs. Crayford."

Formal bows are exchanged; then Lord Crayford says, in biting tones,—

"I was anxious to see if you had further outraged our family name in your choice of a wife. You see, I know there is no degradation to which you have not or will not stoop."

Haidee's face flames with anger; the little hand upon her husband's arm clenches, and the slight figure thrills with hate and scorn for the unnatural old man before her; but apparently Lord Crayford is heedless of these signs.

"Come here," he says, authoritatively. "I want to see you quite close."

To St. Paul's surprise she at once quits his side, and advances to his father with her head thrown back, her dark eyes gleaming like stars.

"You look as good as you are beautiful!" my lord condescends to say. "What induced you to marry my reprobate son?"

"I loved him," she answers, quietly; "and I knew he had been ill-treated by those who should have held him dearer."

"That, my dear young lady, is his version." "And the only one I can believe. No true wife would listen to aspersions on her husband's character, and all his past is known to me."

Lord Crayford regards her with contemptuous pity.

"You believe so. I am quite ready to admit you are truthful and sincere in your statements; but you do not know with what manner of man you have to deal, and your friends were unwise in permitting your marriage. That, of course, is beyond remedy; but, at least, I can give you a word of advice. As you value your own happiness do not go with him. He is a libertine, unprincipled, without honour or sense of honour. He will soon weary of you, ill-treat you, perhaps desert you."

"It is a lie!" St. Paul breaks out, in a white heat of passion. "Do you hate me so greatly that you must needs poison my wife's mind against me?"

"I wish to do my duty, and so warn her what she may expect if she consents to follow your fortunes!" Then turning to Haidee; "He is bad to the core, and he will crush your spirit, break your heart, deceive you in all things, as once he deceived this lady," with a glance at his daughter-in-law.

"Your lordship makes me for a moment wish myself a man," says Haidee, in the lowest of voices; "then I could meet you on equal grounds, and give back the lie to your teeth. I am acquainted with the story of your unnatural dislike of my husband, and not ignorant of Mrs. Cecil Crayford's scandalous treatment of him; and I beg, if you have come merely with the intent to spoil our peace, that you will make your visit very brief. Believe me, your errand is a complete failure."

Despite his anger, St. Paul almost laughs at the unexpected spirit his bride displays; but when she turns to him with quivering lips, and eyes full of loving trust, he puts an arm about her and speaks sternly and concisely,—

"We have heard you out, now go!" and he reaches out his hand to the bell, but Mrs. Crayford makes a gesture for him to pause.

"I did not know that Lord Crayford intended passing any unpleasant strictures on your conduct or I should not have accompanied him. You have my heartiest wishes for your happiness and success."

Listening to the smooth false voice, looking on the beautiful false face, St. Paul wonders

that he could ever have dreamed he loved her, that he had allowed her so to influence his past life; but he only clasps Haidee the closer, and listens to Mrs. Crayford with ill-repressed scorn.

"Won't you shake hands with me, dear? We are sisters now."

Haidee advances, not with the best grace, and tenders the tips of her fingers.

"I hope you will never repent your marriage," whispers the other, "but I am afraid for you, dear. St. Paul always worshipped me."

"I really fear," says Haidee, aloud, and smiling maliciously, "that he has transferred his devotion to me. I know, too, that he pities you sincerely. For your sake, I hope we shall not meet again; it must be so painful for you!"

Mrs. Crayford flushes dusky; she would like to crush this fair, sweet girl, who has won the only man she has ever loved, or can love. She hates her for her beauty and her spirit—for the loyalty with which she has clung to him, in and through all.

But she can find no fitting retort to Haidee's speech, and she is afraid (with St. Paul's eyes upon her) further to insinuate evil of him. So she gathers her skirts about her, and says, with a pensive smile,—

"For the sake of auld lang syne take me downstairs. I see father has gone before," and she lays the tips of her fingers upon the young man's arm. Then with an arch glance at Haidee, "There is no need for jealousy—we are both married now."

"I am not jealous. I know my husband is quite indifferent to you!" and burning with a sense of insult, Haidee turns from her. She hears their steps and voices along the corridor, and so secure is she in her husband's love that she can laugh at Mrs. Crayford's pretensions. "But," she thinks, "they might have spared me the degradation of this visit. I wish we had forbidden them entrance; they have quite spoiled our day."

At the foot of the staircase St. Paul and his companion pause. She looks deprecatingly into his eyes, and there is a tremor in her tones as she says,—

"Can you ever forgive me the wrong I did you?"

"I not only forgive, but am grateful to you that you left me free to win Haidee," he answers, coldly.

She winces under his words, but goes on, after a hurried glance at Lord Crayford, who is waiting for her in the vestibule,—

"I was young and foolish then, and great pressure was brought to bear upon me by my parents. They thought I could do much better than marry you. I cannot tell you what I suffered—"

"Leave that to my imagination," he interrupts, ruthlessly, disgusted by her want of modesty, her utter lack of truth; but she is bent on speaking.

"In common justice to me, hear my side of the argument. They told me lies of you; they worked upon my pride and my ambition, until they induced me to break my promise. Ah! you will believe me!"

He knows how false her words are. He has proved her so utterly wanting in principle, and her own parents have condemned her conduct towards him in strongest language, so he listens with a bored expression, and does not guess the passion she yet cherishes for him.

"Well, I sent you away, and I thought my heart would break, but I was told duty should come before love, and in obedience to my parents' wishes I gave myself to a man I detested. But he was immensely rich, and when he died—you know how short a time my bondage endured—he left me all his wealth. Then I thought 'St. Paul will return to me, and we shall be happy,' but you never came, and in my despair and outraged love I consented to marry Cecil."

She ceases, and St. Paul says slowly and languidly,—

"It was a pity to rake up the past when no

good could come from it. I tell you plainly I cannot have any faith in your story. I know that you ruled your parents, not they you; and your lust of gold led you into your first marriage, your longing for a title into the second. You did not forget, when you accepted Cecil, that at my father's death you would be Lady Crayford. Title and wealth are capital substitutes for love to such women as you!

But for the consciousness that Lord Crayford is watching her she would break utterly and ignominiously down. As it is, her voice is broken, and there are tears in her eyes, as she says,—

"You are very cruel to me, St. Paul. You are making a hard life harder to bear. But say or do what you will, you cannot kill my love. Oh! be kind to me!"

"Let me take you to your carriage, Mrs. Crayford," he answers quietly, "and pray convey my good-bye to Cecil."

She says no more, knowing words are useless, feeling he is lost to her for ever; that never more will he tremble under her touch, or thrill at the sound of her voice, and in her selfish heart she cries bitterly that fate has been very cruel towards her.

St. Paul goes upstairs to his wife. "Thank Heaven! Haidee, they are gone. Little wife, you must forgive and forget my father's insolence for my sake; and as for my brother's wife, she merits only your contempt!"

"My pity too, I fancy, for she loves you still."

Two years have passed, and nothing but good reports have reached the Roundfurns of St. Paul Crayford. Haidee writes in the happiest vein, and an old schoolfellow of Gregory's, who is resident in Calcutta, sends a few lines which go very far to prove Haidee had acted wisely in her conduct towards St. Paul.

They run thus:—

"There is no man here more respected than your brother, no man more loved by those who have needed and received help from him. His home is a Paradise, his wife an angel. I never saw a happier married couple than the Crayfords. Of course you know the Honourable Cecil is dead, and St. Paul succeeds to the title, but he utterly refuses to return to England. His work—he says—lies here at present."

Four years pass by, and Gregory often fears he will never see his sister's face again—that her children will be aliens to him and Aunt Anna, who is rapidly aging now. But one day he takes up his paper, and his eye lights upon a paragraph, headed, "Death of Lord Crayford."

"St. Paul will come home now," he says to Miss Roundfern. "We shall have Haidee with us once more."

"I scarcely hoped such happiness was in store for me," she answers, with a little thankful sob. "Ah! Gregory, our little girl was wiser than we when she elected to marry St. Paul. He is literally a brand plucked from the burning!"

"Yes; I have never forgiven myself for my harshness. And, Aunt Anna, I've shrewd suspicion that young Gregory and Rita will be fairly spoiled if left much to your care."

The old lady only smiles.

One last scene. The Lord of the Manor has returned to his home, and on the large west lawn a happy party is gathered. There is Haidee (now Lady Crayford), lovelier if possible than before, and just a trifle more matronly; and one has but to look into her shining eyes to know she is a happy woman. There is St. Paul, bronzed by Indian suns, graver than we remember him, and evidently content with his lot.

Aunt Anna and Mrs. Barnard are talking confidentially together, whilst Gregory, on hands and knees is enacting "Jumbo" for the special edification of his small relatives.

And a woman peering through the hedge which surrounds the gardens whispers to her aching heart, "I might have stood in her place to-day. I might have been happy wife and mother, but for my cursed ambition," and moves away slowly, henceforth to live unloved and alone.

[THE END.]

FACETIÆ.

GOING the rounds—Climbing the ladder.

MEN who pertinaciously pry into things—Burglars.

THE boy that sprained his ankle has a very lame excuse for not attending school.

IT is admitted that a woman may not tell her age; but it is a stern fact that her age is less considerate. It tells on her.

A SCIENTIST now declares that the tip of the nose is the home of the soul. It has certainly often shown where departed spirits have gone.

GENTLEMAN (to a beggar): "Why, I have just given you something!" Beggar: "Yes, that was for playing the fiddle; but I also do something in the begging line."

"How can I find out all about the young lady to whom I am engaged?" asked a prospective Benedict. "The simplest way would be to marry her," answered his friend.

"Do you have damp sheets?" said the fussy old man at the hotel, securing a room. "No," said the clerk, who wanted to be obliging, "but we can sprinkle 'em for you if you like them that way."

A LITTLE girl, when asked by her mother about suspicious little bites in the sides of a dozen choice apples, answered: "Perhaps, mamma, they may have been frost-bitten, it was so cold last night."

"Is he a young man of brains?" inquired an old gentleman respecting a swell youth. "Well, really," replied his daughter, "I have had no opportunity of judging. I never met him anywhere except in society."

APPROPRIATE AS A RULE.—Organist: "As your party marches down the aisle I will play some impressive march." Prospective Bridegroom: "That's good; but be particular about the key." Organist: "Oh, certainly. I invariably play wedding marches in B flat; two flats seem so appropriate."

SHE WAS DELIGHTED.—Managing Mamma: "Of all things! So you have declined a drive with young Mr. Richtellow, when you know he will go right off and invite your rival, Miss Part?" Wise Daughter: "Yes, ma; and I am delighted to think that it is just what he will do." "You must be crazy! What can be your object?" "I want him to see how horribly red her nose gets in cold weather."

A MIMIC MATRIMONIAL CIRCUS.—Little Dot: "Mamma, Dick and I got married this morning." Mamma: "You did, did you? Who performed the ceremony?" "I don't know what you're talkin' about." "Well, how did you make out you were married?" "Oh! Why, I got my dishes an' set the table an' then we both sat down, an' he said there wasn't a thing fit to eat, an' I said he was as ugly as could be, an' he went out an' slammed the door."

ENGAGING A SERVANT.—Housekeeper: "Are you a good washer and ironer?" Applicant: "Please, mum, the last family I was with sent their wash to the laundry." "Can you make bread?" "Most folks buy of the bakers nowadays, mum." "I suppose you can sweep?" "The lady used to do that, mum, wid a carpet-sweeper." "Well, I suppose you at least know how to wash dishes?" "Indade, mum, if it's a common dishwasher ye want ye better be after hirin' a scullion. Good-day, mum."

"AUGUSTUS, dear," said the gentle girl, tenderly pushing him from her as the moonlight flooded the bay window where they were standing, "I think you had better try some other hair dye; your moustache tastes like turpentine."

DOCTOR: "You must take more exercise. What is your business?" Patient: "I am an insurance agent." Doctor: "Then you ought to get plenty of exercise." Patient: "That depends. You see, sometimes we work on commission and sometimes on salary."

YOUNG PERKINS (exasperated): "Ethel, in a few days I shall be far, far away." Ethel (languidly): "How far?" Young Perkins (desperately): "I know not—thousands of miles, perhaps. To-morrow night I shall leave this house, perhaps for ever." Ethel (with interest): "What's the matter with you to-night, that you should give to-morrow night the preference?"

IT DEPENDS ON CIRCUMSTANCES.—Frivolous young lady (to guide): "How deep is this hole?" Guide: "Never been measured, miss." Frivolous young lady: "Suppose I were to fall down there, where do you suppose I should go to?" Guide: "That depends, miss, upon how you have lived in this world!"

GERMAN COUNTESS: "Baron, will you give me a photograph of yourself?" Baron: "Certainly, madame; you flatter me by asking for it." Countess (after the baron's departure, to her waiting-maid): "Here, Claire, put this picture in your album, where you can study the features closely. Whenever the original of it calls, tell him I am out."

NIGHT-CAPS ARE NOT DUTY-FREE.—Customs Officer: "What have you in that parcel?" "Only my laundry." "Open it and let me see." Man reluctantly opens package, disclosing shirts, collars, cuffs, etc., and a bottle. "I thought you had nothing but laundry in that paper. What's in the bottle?" "Night-caps." "Pass on, sir."

LITTLE DICK: "I'm awful glad you are engaged to sister Nell now." Mr. Nicsefellow: "I feel quite grateful to hear you say that, Dick." "Little Dick: "Yes, you always bring her sweets, and she gives me some, and it's the kind I like, too." Mr. Nicsefellow: "You have a choice, then?" Little Dick: "Oh, yes. You see all the others brought chocolates, and I don't like chocolates."

TO SOOTHE THE SAVAGE BREAST.—"Mary: suppose you sing something." "Oh, it's so late, Charley. I'm afraid it'll awake every one." "That's too bad," exclaimed Charley, with every appearance of distress. "But why do you want me to sing, dear?" she tenderly inquired. "Why you see," he replied, "a fellow I owe two pounds to has been waiting outside all the evening for me, and I thought maybe if you'd sing a little he'd go away."

PRETTY BIG JOKE FOR BOBBY.—Miss Clara (to young Featherly, a guest at dinner): "Won't you have an orange, Mr. Featherly?" Featherly: "Oh, thanks, awfully." Bobby (turning to his mother): "How's that, ma?" Mother: "How is what, Bobby?" Bobby: "Mr. Featherly took an orange from Clara!" Mother: "There, there Bobby; little boys shouldn't talk at the table." Bobby: "Yes, ma, but you said that Mr. Featherly's visits here, so far as Clara is concerned, would be fruitless."

NO SUCH THING AS JUSTICE.—"There is no such thing as justice in this world," said Colonel Yergert to Judge Pennybunker. "What makes you talk that way?" asked Pennybunker. "An item I was reading in the paper." "What was it about?" "A young man promised to marry a girl, but he didn't keep his promise." "What was done to him?" "He was imprisoned for six months." "What injustice is there in that?" "Lots of it. He was deprived of his liberty for six months because he broke his promise to marry a girl, whereas the man who keeps his promise to marry is usually deprived of his liberty for life."

SOCIETY.

HER MAJESTY, in addition to opening the Queen's Hall on the 14th of May, has consented to lay the first stone of the Technical Schools which form part of the People's Palace for East London scheme, and for the cost of which the Drapers' Company have voted £20,000.

THE QUEEN has signified her intention of laying the foundation stone of the proposed Imperial Institute in the course of the ensuing summer. The building is to be in the Royal Horticultural Gardens, between the Albert Hall and the Natural History Museum. The buildings will require about three years to complete.

THE QUEEN OF ITALY has found that London publishers are not only willing but anxious to pay for her manuscript. Her Majesty has recently had three communications from well-known London houses, each making her a liberal offer.

PRINCE AND PRINCESS HENRY OF BATTENBERG have consented to open the Royal Yorkshire Jubilee Exhibition, at Saltaire, on the 6th of May. Their royal highnesses will be the guests of Mr. and Mrs. Titus Salt at Milnerfield.

THE PRINCE OF WALES has entered his yacht, the *Albatross*, in the Jubilee yacht race, which is to start from the Nore and sail round the British Isles. Lord Suffolk and Lord Ormonde will sail on board the *Albatross*.

THE DUKE AND DUCHESS OF EDINBURGH are to arrive at Clarence House about May 10, from Malta.

THE rooms of the Royal Hibernian Academy were crowded with a fashionable assemblage on the 7th of March to witness the opening of its fifty-eighth annual exhibition, by the Lord-Lieutenant and the Marchioness of Londonderry, who were accompanied by the Duchess of Montrose, the Earl of Denbigh, Lady Randolph Churchill, Lady Clara Fielding, Lord and Lady Brooke, Lady Gwendoline Chaplin, and the Hon. Miriam Thelsson. Their excellencies were received by the president, Sir Thomas Jones, and the members of the council of the R.H.A., and conducted through the rooms, and they appeared much interested in the various works of art pointed out to their notice. The exhibition is an extremely good one, both as regards native and other talent.

THE marriage of Lord Arthur Butler, second son of John, second Marquis of Ormonde, and brother of the present peer, with Miss Ellen S. Stager, daughter of the late Gen. Anson Stager, U.S.A., was celebrated in St. George's Church, Hanover-square, on the 5th of March. The wedding-party, which assembled at the church at a quarter to two o'clock, was restricted to the near relations of the bride and bridegroom and a few intimate friends.

Sir Simon Lockhart (1st Life Guards) acted as Lord Arthur's best man; and in attendance on the bride were five children bridesmaids, all nieces of the bridegroom. They were dressed in white silk, the skirts being box-pleated, and the polonaises open in front with revers, collars and cuffs of white velvet; their hats, of a modified Mephistophelian shape, were turned up with gathered white silk, and trimmed with white feathers. Each wore a diamond and turquoise pin, the bridegroom's gift, and carried a posy of lilies of the valley.

The bride was accompanied to the church by her sister, Mrs. Hickox, and was received on alighting by her brother-in-law, Mr. Hickox, who afterwards gave her away. She was attired in a dress of rich white faille, with a long train; the petticoat was draped with pearl embroidered tulle, and the V-shaped bodice was filled in with tulle and trimmed with orange blossoms. She wore a wreath of orange blossoms in her hair, and a tulle veil fastened with diamond stars.

STATISTICS.

THE United States consumes about 1,500,000 tons of sugar every year, and this comprises 100,000 tons of beet sugar from Europe. Of the remainder Louisiana and one or two other States on the Gulf coast raise about 50,000 tons, leaving 1,350,000 tons to be imported from the West Indies and the Sandwich Islands.

ACCORDING to the report of the Director of the United States Mint, the production of gold during 1886 exceeded that of any previous year since 1880, and almost equalled the production of the latter year. This amounted to £7,000,000 in 1886, against the sum of £6,200,800 in 1885, an increase of more than £800,000. The production of silver, as nearly as can be ascertained, was £10,000,000. The amount of gold bullion imported into the United States was £3,589,500, and the exports £5,572,527. The importations were made almost exclusively since August last. There was also imported gold coin of the value of £4,672,382, and gold coin was exported to the value of £2,678,776. The total exports of gold bullion and coin were £8,256,273, which corresponds almost exactly with the amount imported, so that there was a slight gain by the movement of gold to and from the United States during the calendar year.

GEMS.

PEDANTRY consists in the use of words unsuited to the time, place and company.

WHETHER happiness may come or not, we should try to prepare ourselves to do without it.

VICTORY over things is the office of man. Of course until it is accomplished, it is the war and insult of things over him.

THEY who have never known prosperity can hardly be said to be unhappy; it is from the remembrance of joys we have lost that the arrows of affliction are pointed.

WASTE no time in cherishing vain dreams, indulging idle speculations, or in giving way to depressing emotions, but resolutely throw them off, and engage in whatever actual work appears most pressing and important.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

FISH A LA CREME.—Strip into small pieces enough salt codfish to make one and a half pints, put into cold water in a pan over the fire, and let it come to a boil. Repeat this, as it will freshen it sufficiently. Pour off the water and add one quart of milk with one and a half tablespoonfuls of flour mixed with a little water. Stir steadily until it boils, then add a piece of butter the size of an egg. Have ready two eggs well beaten; stir in thoroughly when ready to take off the stove.

CALF'S LIVER WITH CREAM SAUCE.—Use for six persons two pounds of liver, five tablespoonfuls of butter, three gills of milk, three teaspoonfuls of flour, a sprig of parsley, a slice of onion, and salt and pepper for seasoning. Cut the liver into small thin slices, and cover it with cold water. Let it stand for ten minutes, then drain it. Put the butter into a frying-pan, and when it begins to bubble put in the liver, seasoned with salt and pepper. Cook rather slowly for six minutes, and brown slightly on both sides. Now take up the liver and put it where it will keep warm. Put the onion and parsley into the butter remaining in the pan, and cook for one minute; then add the flour, and stir until the liquid begins to froth. Draw the pan back, and gradually add the cold milk. Cook for one minute, stirring all the while; then put in the liver, and cook slowly for five minutes longer. This dish will answer for breakfast, luncheon, or tea.

MISCELLANEOUS.

LENGTH of life is to be estimated not by number of years so much as by good work done—not by endeavours solely to advance our own fortune, and reputation or comfort, but by persevering efforts to promote the welfare of our fellow-men.

COULD we but read aright, we should find that every human being, in greater or in lesser degree, carries the lineaments of the life, if such an expression is allowable, in the face. Good looks or ill looks accord respectively with the complexion of the life. It is very certain that beauty is added to and called forth by the exercise of the kindly affections of love, of pity, of trust, of hope, and of pure joy; and it is equally certain that intellectual qualities have a similar result, for we have it upon ancient and high authority that "a man's wisdom maketh his face to shine, and the hardness of his face is changed." Thus beauty is not only skin deep, as another saying affirms, but it may also be said to be so natural that it goes all through.

SAYINGS WORTH REMEMBERING.—Agassiz's intense enthusiasm in his favourite study of natural history is well known, and its permanent fruits are now seen in the great museum in Cambridge, the most comprehensive in the United States, and one of the finest in the world. But it is not so well known that he pursued this study with a deliberate sacrifice of personal advantage, and of the opportunity of wealth. He was a popular lecturer, and could have made his own terms with lyceums eager to hear him. But his reply to such overtures is one of the noblest on record:—"I cannot afford to make money." A reply equally noteworthy was made by Albert Gallatin, one of the great statesmen and financiers of the post-Revolutionary period. He was a successor to Hamilton as the Secretary of the Treasury, and managed the national finances with equal ability and success. But his manner of living was a model of Republican simplicity, and he died poor, though millions passed through his hands. The great banker, Alexander Baring, admired his character, and was troubled that so noble a man should be hampered by inadequate means of living. He offered Mr. Gallatin a handsome fortune, which would have made him comfortable to the end of his life. Mr. Gallatin firmly declined it, saying with emphasis:—"The man who has the direction of the finances of a country should never die rich."

JULIUS CESAR.—In person Caesar was tall and slight. His features were more refined than usual in Roman faces; the forehead was wide and high, the nose large and thin, the lips full, the eyes dark-grey, like an eagle's, the neck extremely thick and sinewy. His complexion was pale, his beard and moustache were kept carefully shaved. His hair was short and naturally scanty, falling off towards the end of his life and leaving him partially bald. His voice, especially when he spoke in public, was high and shrill. His health was uniformly strong until his last years, when he became subject to epileptic fits. He was a great bathor and scrupulously clean in all his habits, abstemious in his food, rarely touching wine. He was an athlete in early life, admirable in all manly exercises, and especially in riding. From his boyhood it was observed of him that he was the truest of friends, that he avoided quarrels, and was most easily appeased when offended. In manner he was quiet and gentlemanlike, with the natural courtesy of high breeding. On one occasion when he was dining somewhere the other guests found the oil too rancid for them. Caesar took it without remark, to spare his entertainer's feelings. When on a journey through a forest with his friend Oppius he came one night to a hut where there was a single bed. Oppius being unwell, Caesar gave it up to him, and slept on the ground.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

L. D. J.—1. Pencils are generally used. 2. Quite good. 3. Soon.

T. L.—Laving the eyes with tepid water sometimes helps to remove the black lines under them.

W. H.—A tree called the red wood grows in California, but we cannot say whether it is the one you refer to or not.

W. T.—Bathe your face night and morning in a solution of borax and water until the pimples are removed. Also be particular about your diet, avoiding all rich, salt, or greasy food.

C. S.—1. Bathe your eyes night and morning in a solution of table-salt and water, and the trouble of which you complain will probably pass away. Your eyes are weak. 2. No.

LORRIE LATIMER.—It is a case, we suppose, of mere infatuation which she has not strength of mind to resist. It is very deplorable. Surely her friends should step in and reason with her on the matter.

H. H.—Calliope, in Greek mythology, is the muse of epic poetry, named from the sweetness of her voice. She is represented as bearing a tablet and stylus, waiting to record heroic deeds.

O. P.—To render the colour of cotton fabric permanent, dissolve three gills of salt in four quarts of hot water. Put in the calico and let it remain until the water is cold. The colours will not fade by subsequent washing.

M. C.—The readiest way to find whether soap will injure the delicate skin of women or children is to test it with the tongue. Good soap, in which the caustic alkali is neutralized by thorough combination with the fat, will not have a sharp taste.

R. F. A.—To detect chalk in milk, dilute the milk with water; the chalk, if there be any, will settle to the bottom in an hour or two; put to the sediment an acid—vinegar, for instance—and if effervescence takes place, it is chalk.

EDITH.—We do not see any objection to the union excepting the young lady's age. We think she would do well to wait several years before thinking of wedding any one. Her weight is too great for her size, and we would advise her to take plenty of outdoor exercise.

E. M.—In the eye of the law the Indian originally held an anomalous position, neither citizen nor alien, and incapable of becoming a citizen; but the disabilities have been removed, and Indians are now enabled to leave their tribes or renounce the tribal system as a body, and become citizens.

H. H.—The seven Bibles of the world are the Koran of the Mohammedans, the Tri Pitake of the Buddhists, the Five Kings of the Chinese, the Three Vedas of the Hindoos, the Eddas of the Scandinavians, the Zendavesta (or Zend Avesta) of the Persians, and the Scriptures of the Christians.

L. S. P.—The term Quaker was first applied to members of the Society of Friends in derision. George Fox once bore a persecuting magistrate to "tremble at the name of the Lord," whereupon the official jeeringly called him a Quaker. The epithet thus fastened upon Fox has adhered to his followers to this day. A Quaker once was summoned to the presence of King Charles II., and the king, observing that the Quaker kept his hat on, removed his own. The Quaker asked, "Why does your Majesty remove your hat?" The king humorously replied, "It is customary for only one person at a time to wear a hat in this place."

D. C.—Salvator Rosa was an Italian painter who was born at Aranello, near Naples, on June 20th, 1615. He died in Rome on March 15th, 1673. In the interest of his art he associated in early life with banditti in the wildest regions of Calabria. Subsequently in Rome he became celebrated not only as a painter, but also as a poet, musician, and actor. In 1647 he took part in the insurrection at Naples under Masaniello, after whose overthrow he fled to Rome. He is best known as a landscape painter, having been one of the first in Italy to practice that branch with success, but he also excelled in portraits as an engraver.

S. S.—The lyre-bird is so named from the form of its tail. There are three kinds of feathers in the tail, which are long, and sixteen in number. Twelve have long, slender shafts, with delicate filaments more and more distant towards the end; the middle two feathers, longer than the rest, are pointed at the ends, and barbed only on the inner edge; the external two feathers are broad, growing wider to the ends, and curving outward like an elongated S, the two resembling much the outline of the ancient lyre. These singular birds (natives of Australia) live in pairs in rocky places overgrown with bushes. Their motions are graceful, the males displaying the tail feathers like a peacock.

B. F.—To make angel cake, take one-half tumbler of granulated sugar, one tumbler of sifted flour, one teaspoonful of vanilla, and one teaspoonful of cream of tartar; sift the flour four times, add the cream of tartar and sift again. Sift the sugar and measure; beat the whites of seven eggs to a stiff froth; then add the sugar lightly, a little at a time; then the flour the same way, and then the vanilla. Do not stop beating until you put it in the pan to bake. Bake for forty minutes in a moderate oven, not opening the doors for the first fifteen minutes. Try it, and if not done, let it stand for a few minutes longer. The tumbler must hold two and a quarter gills. Put the icing on the cake as soon as it is taken from the oven.

W. W. M.—The best cosmetic for the hands is glycerine and lemon juice with a little fresh lemon juice.

E. M.—"Annals" were richly-bound volumes, published annually, containing poetry, tales, and essays, by eminent authors, and illustrated by engravings. The first appeared in London in 1825. There were imitations of similar books in Germany.

W. F.—Lago Maggiore is a lake in Northern Italy and Switzerland, enclosed by Lombardy, Piedmont, and the canton of Ticino. Greatest length 40 miles, greatest breadth 2 miles, greatest depth 2,625 feet. The name is pronounced la-go-mad-jo-ra.

E. C. F.—The Borromean Islands, celebrated for their picturesque beauty, are near the entrance of the Gulf of Tosa, on the west side. They are so called from two of them, Isola Bella and Isola Madre, being the property of the family of that name.

W. H. S.—The bark of sassafras root is stimulant, and perhaps diaphoretic; though its possession of any peculiar tendency to the skin, independently of its more excitant property, is very doubtful. A kind of tea is made from it, which is used as a domestic medicine, and is thought to purify the blood. The bark chewed in excess is injurious to the teeth.

G. M.—Red River is a tributary of the Mississippi, and the last of any great size that it receives. It rises in Texas, passes into Louisiana, and afterwards flows south-east, entering the Mississippi 311 miles above its mouth. Its length is about 1,300 miles. Its riverine name from its peculiar colour, supposed to be derived from the red clay through which its upper course lies.

THE CHEERFUL FACE.

How many souls with grief distressed
We meet along the way;
How many hearts with wrong oppressed
Pass by us through the day!
Yet we may soothe the worst despair,
If we the time embrace;
And, with kind words, will also wear
A bright and cheerful face!

It is the mirror of the heart,
Reflecting what is good;
It has no hollowness of art,
And no deceptive mood.
Oh, what's so beautiful and sweet,
And what so in its place,
As winning, gladness and complete,
As woman's cheerful face?

It has the charm in young and old,
The gentle and the brave,
And lives in grateful stories told,
When they are in the grave;
For hearts that gladden at their sight
Still keep for them a place,
And speak in tender sweet delight
Of each bright, cheerful face!

D. B. W.

E. C. C.—The first elevated railway—the New York Elevated Railway Company—was begun in 1866, and commenced operations in 1872, running from the Battery along Greenwich-street and Ninth avenue to Thirtieth-street. The original plan of operating it by stationary engines and endless wire ropes was abandoned for dummy engines.

C. C.—The origin of the sandwich is generally ascribed to the Earl of Sandwich, who was so addicted to play that he would pass whole days at the gambling table without taking any refreshment save a piece of meat between two slices of bread; but it is said that this substitute for a regular meal was not first used by the Earl in the reign of George III., as the Romans had eaten them long before. They called them *opula*.

J. N. P.—The masque was a species of dramatic entertainment, and was much cultivated in Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It included scenic effects and dancing. Originating in the pageants of the middle ages, the actors in which wore masks, it gradually became a recognized form of the spoken drama. In the reign of James I., leading dramatic authors, with the exception of Shakespeare, wrote masques for the court.

E. D. A.—The terrible fire in Chicago, U.S., occurred in October, 1871. There had been several unusually large fires on previous days, but on Sunday evening, October 8, the great fire originated from the upsetting, as is supposed, of a lighted kerosene lamp. The fire continued all day Monday, and the progress of the flames was not checked until Tuesday morning. The value of the property destroyed was not less than £18,000,000.

E. C.—In making coconut cakes use the following ingredients: One coconut, carefully skinned and grated; the milk of the same; one pound a half of powdered sugar; as much water as you have coconut milk, and the whites of three eggs. Dissolve one pound of sugar in the milk and water; stew until it becomes a rosy syrup, and turn out into a buttered dish. Have ready the beaten white of an egg, with the remaining half-pound of sugar whipped into it; mix with this the grated coconut, and little by little, beating all the while, the boiled syrup, as soon as it cools sufficiently not to scald the eggs. Drop in tablespoonfuls upon buttered papers. Try one first, and if it runs, beat in more sugar. Bake in a very moderate oven, watching to prevent scorching. They should not be allowed to brown at all; and although they will keep for some time, are best when quite fresh.

CARIE W.—November 11, 1863, came on a Wednesday.

W. W.—First-class cookery-books cost from 5s. upwards, and are obtainable at any bookseller's, or may be ordered through a newsgate.

G. W.—The only proper way of getting an introduction to a lady is to enlist the services of a mutual friend to thus honour you.

A. F.—There are several books which contain recipes for staining wood, &c., but we are unable, in this place, to recommend any special one to your notice.

E. V.—You doubtless have an energetic and active mind, judging from the strength displayed in your handwriting.

V. M. R.—There is nothing we are acquainted with that will make the hands smaller. Be content with what nature has provided for you. It does not at all follow that a large hand is unhandy.

L. C.—A lady should always thank her escort for his kindness in attending her at a ball, or other entertainment. She can do so in a few simple, complimentary words, expressive of her appreciation of the pleasure afforded.

B. S.—Christ cross row, or criss cross row, is a familiar designation formerly applied to the first line, or row, of the alphabet, as arranged in the old horn-books or primers. The first line commenced with a Greek cross, and it was from that fact that the term originated.

E. N.—Judged by your superior penmanship it is difficult to believe that you are engaged daily in hard manual labour. At nothing under the sun is absolutely perfect, it stands to reason that practice will improve handwriting, no matter how neat or pretty it may be.

T. D.—Leap-years coincide with the years that are divisible by four, and thus they may be known. It is for this reason that 1897, '98, and '99 will not be leap-years. Of the years concluding centuries, only every fourth is a leap-year, beginning with 2,000, which is divisible by 400, as is also 2,400, &c.

A. M.—We would willingly advise you concerning the discovery of the whereabouts of your boy, but unfortunately we have no means of tracing him. Perhaps the authorities of the town from which he last wrote can furnish you with some information concerning his subsequent movements. If this suggestion meets with your approval, address the note of inquiry to the chief of police of the place in question and to the Postmaster.

G. S.—The difficulty of making a canvas bag airtight would be in hermetically closing the seams or seams. Were it not for this fact, such a bag could be coated with liquid rubber. A rubber bag will prove much more satisfactory, and can be made of sufficient thickness to withstand an inside pressure of twenty or twenty-five pounds to the square inch. There are several rubber dealers in your city from whom such an article may be purchased. It would be advisable to have it made to order.

L. L.—These lines would prove very acceptable for the occasion:

"Spring has not come—why should we wait
Until the birds around us mate?
This is the good old-fashioned day
When hearts anticipate the May,
And choose a friend and champion dear,
To serve them truly for a year.
Follow the fashion frank and free,
And fix your friendly oblige on me,
And give me rapture half-divine
By owing me your Valentine."

Keep them till next year.

E. M.—After giving the matter the most particular thought and attention we are compelled to state that to us the reason for your friend sending you a couple of matches wrapped in paper is unobtainable. Perhaps the sender, knowing that you were considered matchless in every way, determined in a jealous moment to render such an opinion valueless; or, again, in some idle moment, without malice aforethought, he has related some story which, seeming obscure to your friend, he or she has sent this little hint that more light on the subject is needed.

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London: Published for the Proprietor, at 334, Strand, by J. R. SPECK; and Printed by WOODFALL and KIMBER, Millard Lane, Strand.